THEN CAME CAROLINE

LELA HORN RICHARDS

Elizabeth Bryant

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"But most of all I want to live—to understand people." FRONTISPIECE. *See page* 301.

THEN CAME CAROLINE

BY

LELA HORN RICHARDS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

M. L. GREER

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ANNA COLBURN PLUMMER

To you, good friend,
and
To the long years of happy and profitable
comradeship.

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THEN CAME CAROLINE

CHAPTER I

An Interrupted Drama

MAUM RACHEL parted the faded velvet curtains that sheltered the drawing-room from the great, draughty hall and put an anxious face through the rift.

"Miss Em'bly," she called softly. "Miss Em'bly, please, ma'am, come here a minute!"

Mrs. Ravenel's small white hands fluttering over the teacups paused for a moment. She turned an inquiring face toward the curtains. There was a shade of annoyance on her usually serene countenance, — just a shade, for it was contrary to Kirtley precedents to show irritation in company, to lose for an instant the stately poise that had descended like a mantle from past generation

"Out here, please, Miss Em'bly. I got to speak to you."

Smiling excuses to her guests, Emily Ravenel crossed the long room and stood within the hall.

"It's Miss Car'line agin, Miss Em'bly," Rachel began, her thick lip with its pale yellow lining protruding angrily. "Rufus ain't no sooner opened the front door on Miz Colfax and Miss Rose, when she begin troopin' up all the chillun in the neighborhood. She's out on the woodpile, zaggeratin' agin, for all she's worth, scarin' them no-count Jilsen kids to spasms with her yarns 'bout de debil and de deep seas. Betty Fairfield got to yellin' so her mother come and took her home. She say she cain't never come over here no more. No, ma'am ! — not ef — *Good Lord! What 'at?"*

An agonizing scream rising on the still September air pierced its way from the back yard to the portals of the blue drawing-room.

Mrs. Ravenel's face whitened; involuntarily her eyes lifted to the chamber on the landing above. A chamber that was kept singularly free from disturbance, especially at this hour of the afternoon when Doctor Ravenel took his customary rest.

Rachel, outraged and belligerent, started for the kitchen, her torn carpet slippers slapping the bare floors testily.

"Dat chile *suttanly* is gwine be de death of her poor sick Paw," she muttered, trying to keep up with Mrs. Ravenel's quickened steps. *"She suttanly* ——"

A frightened mulatto girl of some sixteen years interrupted the prophecy.

"It's Willie Boland," she said, her words coming in a torrent. "Miss Car'line, she done make believe the woodpile was the Red Sea. She had 'em all a-crossin,' and when they get a good start she yell 'sharks;' and that poor white trash Jilsen girl she push Willie, and he fell on the saw Rufus lef' on a log, and he cut his face and hurt his laig ——"

Rachel's hands shot above her head indignantly.

"Red Sea!" she snorted, moving on to the kitchen. "I knew last Sunday, when Miss Em'bly taken her to meetin' agin, they'd be the debil to pay. I knew she'd be a-res'rectin' Daniel in his den, or feedin' the multitude outen my fresh bakin'. Nobody ever knows what she's gwine try next."

"She ain't been to meetin' fer some time, is she?" Judy speculated. "Not since the day she blew out the candles the altar boys was carryin' up the aisle ——"

In spite of her wrath, Maum Rachel chuckled heartily, and her heavy shoulders shook with mirth.

"Lord save us, that nearly combust de congregation, sure nuff! And Miss Em'bly plum innercent of what her chile was a-doin' till the

minister stop dead in his tracks and frown down on her — Who all been in my cooky jar?"

"Miss Car'line. She had to get up a lunch fer de chillun to carry with 'em crost the sea. That was the only way she could get 'em to cross." Judy's lips broke in a slow smile.

Willie's screams had dwindled to a moan when Mrs. Ravenel reached the long back yard that stretched in an irregular triangle to the lap of the low Virginia hills.

At the first outcry on that still afternoon, there had been a swift scuttling of frightened feet, an exodus of "trash" and "gentry," for Caroline, cosmopolite from the soles of her impudent, high-arched, Kirtley feet, to the crown of her wavy, sun-burned hair, had established a democracy that was at once the bane and the admiration of the neighborhood.

The yard was deserted, save for the two occupants of the woodpile. Caroline had managed to extricate enough of Willie's body from the grip of the logs to pillow his head on her knees. She was stanching the blood on his temple with a hastily torn ruffle from her white petticoat when she felt her mother's eyes upon her.

"He's cut his head and hurt his leg. I think maybe it is broken," she said with calm that would have done credit to her surgeon father. "I reckon we must waken the Major."

"Caroline! Is it really so bad as that? I do not think ——"

Mrs. Ravenel's respect for the English language never failed, even in the most tragic moments: she would no more have thought of taking a cross-cut through a sentence than through a traffic jam.

"I do not think that your father is able to perform an operation to-day. He is very miserable."

In Caroline's amber eyes anxiety gave place to scorn.

"Do you think Major would let *anybody* set a bone that was broken on our woodpile? Certainly not. He will set it, and I will nurse Willie till he gets well."

Despite the fact that Willie's head was perilously near the edge of her spread knees she drew herself from the waist up — she could not rise — to her ten years' height. The thrill that shot like an electric current through her sacrificial veins warmed her enthusiasm. It was characteristic of Caroline that she never lost an opportunity to exploit an emotion, to lift it if possible to the n'th degree.

"But I tell you, Caroline, that he is not able ——"

The appearance of Rufus put an end to the discussion.

"De Major he say fer me to carry de chile into

the office." Then, lowering his voice, "He say he done break a bone; he know de cry."

The old negro lifted the afflicting log and freed Willie's leg. Then he gathered him in his arms, regardless of remonstrance, and carried him into the wing that was given over to Doctor Ravenel's profession.

Caroline walked by Rufus, catching at Willie's dangling hand, whispering words of encouragement.

"You are quite sure that you are able to undertake this, Doctor?" his wife inquired, pausing at the office door. She always addressed her husband with quaint dignity.

"It is scarcely a question of *can*," the tall, sick-looking man replied, motioning Rufus to a couch at the end of the room. "Send Leigh here immediately, please. Caroline may go with you."

At the announcement Caroline stepped into the room and stood for the briefest instant before her father with her slender, begrimed hand pressed against her brow in salutation. The gesture — it amounted to little more — was a remnant of early army life, baby days spent at a well-known post where her father was surgeon. There, also, she had first lisped Major, rather than Father, and the habit clung.

"Please let me stay, Major," she begged.

Doctor Ravenel shook his head; his lips were strangely grim. The expression, foreign to his fine face, (where his fourth daughter was concerned) hurt inexpressibly.

"You may go with your mother, Caroline. At once."

No one ever argued a question with Doctor Ravenel. He had reared his children with a thoroughly commendable attitude toward obedience, impelled, no doubt, by a certain laxness on the part of their mother. Mrs. Ravenel was too gentle, too yielding to indulge in disturbing discipline. It grated on her sensitive nature and upset her digestive organs. She usually capitulated to annoying controversies with, "Your father will settle the matter," or, "Go to Leigh."

In the hall Caroline and her mother parted, Mrs. Ravenel turning toward the drawing-room and her neglected guests.

"I think you had better go to your room, darling," she admonished, as the child reluctantly began to climb the stairs, "and think over your disobedience until your father is ready to talk with you. And tell sister she is needed in the office immediately."

The drawing-room was empty save for Maum Rachel, who was picking up fragile cups and saucers preparatory to carrying out the service.

"Miz Colfax and Miss Rose done lef their

compliments fer y'all," she mumbled, shoving the dishes onto a waiting tray. "They say they reckon Miss Car'line been up to some debilment and they better be going. They say they pow'ful glad their little Massa Tom he gone to dancin' school this afternoon 'les he be in the fracas and git his head busted up like Massa Willie ——"

"That will do, Rachel. Mrs. Colfax's remarks were not meant for repetition."

"Miss Car'line she done get us all in wrong with the neighbors, Miss Em'bly; she sure ——"

A decided wave of her mistress's hand stopped Rachel's grievance. She left the room in sullen silence.

Caroline wended her way up the broad stairs with provoking deliberation until she reached the landing. Then she ran lightly down the wide, gloomy hall, opening a door at the extreme end.

A girl of seventeen sat by an open window with a mending basket on her lap. In her hand she held a child's white stocking, upon which she was patiently working.

She looked up with a smile as wan as it was expectant.

"What is it, honey?" she asked, and a little frown came between her clear blue eyes. "You're not in trouble again?"

"We were acting the Garden of Eden." *Page* 9.

Caroline's answer was straight and to the point.

"Willie Boland got hurt on the woodpile. Maybe his leg's broken (her face was strangely eager) and Major wants you to come down to the office right away and help him fix it."

Leigh put the stocking in the basket and rose with a sigh. She moved slowly as she crossed the room to throw an affectionate arm around her sister's shoulder. An early illness had left her frail, with a tendency toward a curved spine, but the strength that ebbed from her wasted body had not been lost: it had flowed to her soul. Leigh Ravenel was the flower and stay of her adoring, dependent family.

"Caroline," she whispered, "how dreadful! How did it happen?"

"Oh, we were acting the Garden of Eden. I made up a play last Sunday in church. I'll tell you about it when you come back. Give my love to Willie and tell him it's a good deal his own fault. I wanted him to take my place and be God, but he didn't like standing on a mound giving blessings. And let me know when its all over, for I'm going to nurse him until he's well again."

Leigh's horrified expression was lost in the shadowy hall, and Caroline turned to the front of the house. She longed to go downstairs and

listen just outside the office door to Willie's moans; to suffer with him (she even limped a little and felt her way along the wall in lieu of a crutch, thinking how he would walk when he recovered), but the Major had said *"Upstairs."*

Instead of opening her own door, she leaned over the banister, to be rewarded by several sharp, terrifying yells and a number of low, heart-breaking moans, moans that found a smothered echo on the second landing. And there was the entrancing odor of an escaping anesthetic, an odor so satisfying to her greedy emotions that she stood for some minutes with closed eyes and invitingly distended nostrils.

A deathlike calm followed the moans; a calm so ominous that Caroline's imagination took new flight. Perhaps Willie was dead. Poor Willie, who only a short half-hour ago was so happily hopping over the woodpile to escape sharks. But death was not so terrible, at least not at first, when people were busy with the funeral. A funeral! She closed her eyes and behind them a picture slowly unfolded. Perhaps, since she had been instrumental in bringing Willie to an untimely end, his family would let her have charge of the funeral, choose the hymns: "Onward, Christian Soldiers", or — though it was more often used at weddings — "The Breath that

Blew O'er Eden." That would be appropriate, too.

Leigh's whitened face as she left the office and laboriously pulled up the stairs brought the startling question:

"Is he dead, Sister? He stopped moaning, all so sudden ——"

Like the Major's, Leigh's lips tightened. Her expression was singularly like her father's, although she had inherited the fair skin and clear, round eyes of the Kirtleys.

"No, Caroline; fortunately you have not killed him with your foolish play, but he has a broken ankle which will keep him in bed for some time and possibly cripple him. It is a very bad fracture."

"Is it really? And you think maybe he will be lame? Oh, Leigh, do you 'spose his mother will expect me to marry him and take care of him? I don't like the Bolands a bit, even if they are a good family, but of course I would be willing ——"

"I think you had better go to your room and wash your face and hands. Father wants to see you in the office in ten minutes."

"Is Willie still there?"

"No, his mother came for him in the carriage."

"Was she terribly angry?"

"Naturally, she was indignant."

It was a clean and chastened Caroline that later knocked at the office door. The low and somewhat muffled "Come in" sounded harsh and inhospitable.

Doctor Ravenel was busy at his desk. He raised his head from a file of papers long enough to wave Caroline to a chair by the window and went on with his work.

For a while she sat still, her thin little body (she seemed more sprite than child) bent forward in the chair, her small hands with their slender, tapering fingers clasped tightly in her pink pinafore.

Now and then she glanced at the old clock ticking patiently in the reception room beyond. Across the hall she could see Judy passing back and forth, setting the table for the evening meal. She wondered if she would be permitted to dine with the family. There had been times when the privilege was denied her.

Earlier in the afternoon it had showered, and through the open window waves of air brought the scent of mignonette and the sweet, loamy fragrance of purple and white phlox. Caroline sniffed it dreamily. She would go out later on and gather a bouquet to carry over to poor Willie, a peace offering. On second thought she believed it would be better to save the flowers — in case ——

She scarcely dared contemplate the picture that rose in her mind, sweeping it away conscientiously.

Her eyes wandered from the garden to the familiar room, littered and shabby. She wondered if Willy had occupied the cranky, green rep chair with its squeaky levers while his bones were being slipped into place, or the pine table with its white oilcloth covering. The table probably; the soft, quilted pad that Leigh had finished a few days before was mussed and soiled.

The silence deepened. Judy had finished the table and gone back to the kitchen. Caroline could hear her clear, high voice raised in a favorite song:

"Come on, sinners, come on, sinners, get a boat,
Get a boat — get a boat fer to cross ole
Jerden."

A trembling sigh left Caroline's lips. She wished the Major would hurry with his work. She hated suspense. Perhaps he had forgotten about her.

She rose quietly and started on tiptoe toward the door, but a glance from the stern hazel eyes turned in her direction pinned her to the chair.

"I — I was just goin' for a drink, Major," she apologized. "Wouldn't you like a lemonade yourself — or a julep, maybe? I gathered some mint awhile ago. It's nice and cold ——"

The bowed head with its fast silvering hair shook ungratefully.

The clock ticked on: the stillness became unbearable.

Suddenly Caroline understood. The Major was angry. He was not interested in the papers that engrossed his attention; — he was simply gaining time, getting hold of himself, bringing every atom of will to bear upon his temper, to control it.

She sank back in the chair.

Uncomfortable chills raced up and down her spine. Through the haze of her bestirring brain crept a memory, another occasion when she had occupied the chair by the window.

The memory of that fateful hour was stamped indelibly upon her mind. Ever a realist, she had taken a sharp stick and pushed out two front teeth (to be sure they were loose) to better emulate a witch in one of her numerous dramas. The result proved disastrous. From that day forth the family slogan had been, "Remember your teeth, Caroline!" when her spirited fancy wandered. *Remember them?* As if she could ever forget the pain and humiliation of having the new ones probed for and guided, to say nothing of sacrifices occasioned by repeated dentist's bills.

Doctor Ravenel raised his head at last, folded

his papers and thrust them into a drawer at the side of his desk.

Then he crossed the room and, closing the door that opened to the hall, turned the key in the lock.

CHAPTER II

Caroline Cogitates

THE Kirtley mansion, as it was familiarly alluded to by the oldest inhabitants of Warrensburg, had gradually sunk from former grandeur to a state little short of decadence. Its galleries sagged, its stately pillars were scarred and weather-beaten; and along the flagstone path that led to the massive front door, wild grass and sportive daisies played hide and seek the summer through, unmolested by trowel or rake.

Even the town, once proud of the high ground where aristocracy established its habitation, had turned its back and sauntered leisurely through the valley, building its show places along the river that wound in and out among elms and oaks.

But in the South, name and reputation live longer than house or location, so that the Ravenels, while inconvenienced by the general dilapidation going on about them, were in no way ostracized by it. It would have taken a good deal of courage for any one of the *nouveaux riches*, fast

springing up in the metropolis, to snub a Kirtley, or look askance at the deteriorating house set in its deserted half-acre. Remote and run down as it was, the place still held the glamor of happier days; days when old Colonel Kirtley, with blood bluer than the bluest in Warrensburg County, rode all day long without reaching the end of his own domain.

His portrait still hung in the hall, an aristocrat of the old South, in ruff and periwig; his slender, silk-stockinged legs crossed carelessly, his gold-headed riding crop in his shapely hand.

The portrait was an heirloom treasured beyond price. Every Kirtley, from the gentleman's own son down, had stood in awe before it, and such stress had been laid upon the importance of great, great-grandfather Kirtley (so it was told) that a child of a later generation had one day rushed home from a neighbor's with the astonishing information that *the Berisfords had a great, great-grandfather, too;* a fact to be verified by the family, since the youth had been reared to believe that the Kirtleys possessed a world monopoly on that particular kind of an ancestor.

There was also another portrait that hung in the hall, higher up, in a niche of its own on the first stair landing: Great-aunt Caroline, she of the rosy cheeks and wide leghorn hat drooping with pink roses. It was a graceful portrait,

handsomely executed: Great-aunt Caroline had a pleasant, human look. Her smile was merry; her short, round figure — all that could be seen of it — distractingly plump and dimpled.

This beautiful woman, the youngest sister of Emily Ravenel's father, had, in her eighteenth year, married an Englishman of noble birth and gone to live in his ancestral home across the sea.

Although the Ravenel family had long since lost track of her, the flavor of her beauty and romance remained with them. Her name, with the children at any rate, was a fairy wand which would some day turn their hopes and aspirations into realities.

"When Great-aunt passes on and leaves me her diamond necklace and pearl tiara!" was Alison's frequent *bon mot*. Alison, being extremely handsome, thought a good deal about adornment.

"I shall take my fortune and go to Paris to study art," Mayre always said. Mayre was the dilettante of the family: a jack of all trades and master of none, they ungraciously declared.

"The money will all come to me because I am named for her," Caroline had once remarked, when the subject was in full swing. "And when it does I shall buy a circus of my very own and ride a dappled gray horse in a white tarlatan skirt with a million ruffles on it." To which her younger sister Hope (who could see through

a joke better than she could through fractions) replied amiably:

"I have never seen a horse in skirts; I should think he would be very funny — maybe you wouldn't need a clown."

To-night as Caroline ran upstairs after leaving her father's office, she stopped before the portrait and protruded the end of a very pink tongue at the smiling lips and damask cheeks.

There was no particular reason why Aunt Caroline should have received the brunt of her namesake's outraged feelings unless, being mute, she could not retaliate, and the *moue,* which distorted a very attractive face into a very naughty one, relieved the venom that was gathering in Caroline's wounded breast.

She reached her own room, and turning up a light to make sure Hope was not about, closed the door with a push that just escaped being a slam.

The interview in the office had been long and painful. She had been punished for something she considered no fault of hers. Being extremely just in her own dealings, she resented the stern accusations and the humiliating punishment that had been meted out to her.

She went over to the window and sat down in a little, old-fashioned chair that had descended from one generation of Kirtleys to another: a

comfortable, low chair with a carpet back and seat. At the present moment Caroline found it more soothing than the hard, fiddle-backed mahogany drawn beside it.

It was seven o'clock. Neither she nor her father had dined. But she had not missed the meal. Food was always her last consideration, and to-night Maum Rachel's beaten biscuit and golden-brown chicken would have choked her.

The soft September twilight was coming on, and Caroline put her head out of the window to cool her hot face. She wished that she could go down in the garden and watch the primroses open; the scent that reached her on the cool, damp air was a sympathetic invitation. But the Major's express command had been *"Upstairs in your own room and to bed."*

She sat thinking for some minutes after she had cooled her fevered face. And to think, with Caroline, was to plot. Her mind, many-sided and romantic, always leaped to the sentimental and unusual.

Finally she rose and going over to a chest began taking out her clean clothes and best Sunday shoes and stockings. A sound at the door made her tumble them back in a disorderly heap, regardless of the hours Judy had spent bringing the frocks to their state of polished neatness.

Hope, comfortable and chatty after the ample

evening meal, edged into the room, and taking the fiddle-backed chair, gazed at her sister with interest.

"Caught it, didn't you!" she remarked in a tone that made Caroline grit her teeth and look about for something to hurl at her: there was nothing handy so she compromised by turning her back.

"Willie's worse. Rufus had to hitch up and take father over. What do you suppose they'll do to you if he dies?"

There was no answer from the carpet-backed chair.

"Maum Rachel says you've got a devil in you; she says sometimes they get inside of you, and you can't get them out."

The suggestion proved an inspiration.

"I have, and you'd better look out, Miss Smarty!"

Quick as a flash Caroline rose and, running over to the door, locked it, hurling the key through the open window.

Hope's face whitened and she shrank against the wall.

"And I'm tired of him, so I'm going to give him to you. Here, here, — I make you a present."

Hunching herself into the most grotesque shape possible, Caroline puffed out her cheeks,

turned in her eyes, and with a little fantastic movement of her crossed fingers began to hop toward the terrified child who backed into a corner.

Children left to the care of negro servants are not to blame for the reality of their superstitions. Hope, believing that a transfer of a devil from her sister's bosom to her own was imminent, began to wail loudly.

The sound stopped the antics for a moment, but remembering that Hope had said her father was not at home, Caroline resumed her threatening attitude.

"Here he comes! Take him! Take him! Catch him! Hold on to him!"

Hope's wail rose to a scream.

The hopping had developed into a mad incantation, as original as it was terrifying.

"Don't, don't, please, please don't!" screamed Hope.

"You've got him — got him — I saw him jump — Look out! How do you like him? See his horns?"

A battering on the door drowned the frantic yells.

"Caroline! Caroline! Do you hear me? Open the door instantly." Leigh's tones were clear and judicial.

"Can't. The key isn't here."

"Where is it?"

"Down in the yard where Caroline threw it," came Hope's retaliatory ton

"Tattletale — cry baby — wishey-washey goodey-goodey," floated through the empty keyhole.

It took some time to find Maum Rachel, who always carried pass-keys on the long chain that dangled at her belt.

"I tole Little Miss (Hope was always "Little Miss" to the negroes) dat chile done had a debil," Rachel said as she flung the door wide.

"She has, and she tried to give him to me," Hope screamed. "Oh, Maum Rachel, look at her! Look!"

The incantation had begun again. The old negress threw her hands over her head and made for the hall as fast as her weary limbs would permit.

"She done hoodooed, Miss Leigh! For de lub of de Lord don't you go near her! She's gwine bite in a minute! Judy," she called, "you triflin' nigger, you run over to Marse Boland's an' git her Paw."

The excitement brought Mrs. Ravenel from below, but it was Leigh who took hold of the young culprit and shook her soundly. "Stop it this instant!" she commanded. "Haven't you done enough mischief for one day? *Remember your teeth!*"

Caroline's face resumed its natural shape and her arms went around her sister's neck.

"Oh, Leigh," she cried, "nobody loves me; nobody wants me here and I am going to run away — this very night. You will all see and be sorry — sorry you forced me to leave you. I'll show you!"

It was an old threat to which no one ever paid the slightest attention.

Leigh put her cool cheek against the pink, wet one and whispered:

"Leigh loves you, darling, when you will let her, but you are so naughty, and with poor father ill ——" She drew Hope toward the hall.

"Come with me, dear," she said. "I think we will let Caroline sleep alone to-night."

Caroline tried to look indifferent, but the good fortune thus thrust upon her almost brought a smile.

It took some minutes for the house to resume its usual quiet. Caroline crept back to the window to form her interrupted plans. She heard the front door open and close and knew that her father had returned. Down the hall in the old nursery where she was still comforting Hope, Maum Rachel's crooning voice lifted in song:

"De — wind — is in de west," she sang in a wavering crescendo:

"De — wind — is in de west;
De — turkey's in de nest;
So don't you cry, lil' baby
Don't — you — cry —
Don't — you — cry —
Cry —
Cry.

It was some time before Caroline stirred; when she did she looked about with a sigh. It was a little hard, after all, to leave home. She glanced at the great, high bed with its carved pineapple posts, and wondered if she would ever find another so comfortable. True it was a good deal of trouble to climb into it; that was why the carpet-covered box stood in such close proximity; but once in ——

Judy had neatly turned the heavy linen sheets and put a pair of soft blue slippers beside the box. The sight was a persuasive argument to remain, but — the family needed its lesson.

She glanced through the window into the thickened gloom. A black pall covered the garden. She could no longer see the primroses, wide-eyed now and heavy with fragrance.

"I reckon it would be just as well to pack tonight and get an early start in the morning," she thought, glancing back at the turned coverlets.

Out of the chest came the frocks again. She

scarcely knew what was *à la mode* for running away, but she thought perhaps the best would be none too good. It always paid to impress strangers. She chose the new red and brown plaid that Miss Tilly Macon, the seamstress, had finished the week before. Mayre, in an angelic moment, had said that it brought out the chestnut shades in her thick hair. Mayre could be kind, even complimentary at times, although she had once declared that Caroline's amber eyes had coffee grounds in them, adding with a connoisseur's lingering glance that, after all, she loved the effect. It gave a "speckled" look that was "different."

Next came the shoes. Caroline rather disliked the idea of walking in her best shoes. There was always a complaint about shoes. Providing four pairs monthly was a drain on the family purse: of course Leigh's lasted longer. But her old shoes would look shabby with the new plaid, and anyway, she intended to ride Calico part way.

Two sets of underwear, a toothbrush and comb completed the pile. It looked very little to last until she could buy more (she intended to find work at a farmhouse, returning home in the course of time robed in silks saved from her earnings) but it would be hard to carry more. And *how* was she to carry these? Calico hated bundles tied to his otherwise willing back.

In her extremity she spied a bold red and yellow bandanna handkerchief that Maum Rachel had dropped in her flight. It was just the thing. She folded the comb and toothbrush in the underwear, and dropping them into the handkerchief tied the corners securely.

Then she went back to the window and took another look at the night.

It was raining! A soft patter played on the flagstones below.

"I can't go in the rain. I would spoil everything," she thought, extending her hand to make sure her ears were not deceiving her. Well, I will dress just the same and be ready when it stops.

She was some time getting her hair into two smooth braids: Leigh usually gave it a final touch and perked the hair ribbon that caught them together at the nape of her neck.

There were three buttons in the back of the dress that disdained the holes provided for them; so they were left yawning, and as Mayre had helped herself to the brown stockings that went with the dress, black were substituted.

More and more inviting looked the great bed. Caroline stepped on the box and ran her hand across the immaculate bolster that, in the Ravenel family, took the place of pillows. It was soft and downy.

"I reckon maybe I had better rest with my clothes on till day-light," she decided and, taking off her shoes, climbed in between the fragrant sheets and pulled the blankets over her.

When she awoke faint streaks of dawn were coloring the horizon. The rain had stopped, but damp, misty air floated in through the window with a promise of showers.

The house was as silent as a tomb. The Ravenels (especially since the doctor's illness) were late risers. The negroes' quarters were down in the field back of the barn. They, too, were safe for another hour.

Caroline held her breath as she opened her door and crept down the old stairs that creaked in spite of her careful steps: she had taken the precaution to carry her shoes. In the kitchen she stopped and leisurely laced them, taking time to visit the bread box and doughnut jar on her way out.

The rest was easy. Calico needed no saddle. He was quite accustomed to the weight of his small mistress who nestled like thistledown on his back. His great, honest eyes seemed scarcely inquiring as she bridled him.

Before the smoke had begun to wreathe upward from Maum Rachel's shanty, the two were miles down the valley.

CHAPTER III

Family Affairs

THERE was nothing that gave Mrs. Ravenel more pleasure than to sit on the broad veranda on a summer evening, her white jeweled hands (she had managed to hold to her beautiful rings despite vicissitudes) complacently crossed at her no longer slender waist, and recount to a casual guest the many interesting events that had taken place in her life.

At forty, her face, round and sweet, was as unlined and serene as a girl's of twenty, though her slow manner of speech, her polished diction, her general air of dignity hinted at the well-seasoned fifties.

She usually began with her girlhood, that reconstruction period when the South, bleeding and devastated, had begun to react from the hardships put upon it. Much of the Kirtley fortune had been swept into the general abyss caused by war. Piece by piece land had been sold until only the old home and a badly man-

aged plantation which yielded a negligible income were left.

She often dwelt, with dreamy eyes, on her youthful romance which began at nineteen, when she went to Richmond to visit a relative. It was there she had met Bob Ravenel, one of *the* Ravenels of Virginia, handsome, well educated, with a brilliant future stretching before him. He had come from a line of physicians and surgeons, and people were wont to declare that success was his birthright.

And so it had seemed. There were a dozen or more happy years spent in wandering over the globe — the usual lot of the army man — and then, suddenly, up in Alaska where the cold cuts like a knife, grippe had seized him — seized and shaken him until his sensitive throat and lungs became weakened and inflamed.

A change to a milder climate proved beneficial, but an army man cannot choose his habitation; frequent changes aggravated his condition. Finally there had come a breakdown, the winter after Hope was born, and the old house in the South, shabby and run down as it was, seemed a haven to the anxious family.

It was not a good move, but rest, open air, and the comforts of home will do wonders toward arresting disease. For a time Doctor Ravenel improved, and they lingered on, hoping with each

coming year his health would again permit him to take up the duties he loved.

Mrs. Ravenel usually passed over those anxious days of her married life and proceeded with the children. First had come Leigh. "My precious responsibility," she would sigh and wipe the tears from her mild blue eyes.

"Alison followed in two years, and in two years more Mayre blessed us with her happy little presence; Mayre (here the conversation was usually deflected for a family confidence — that is, if the visitor were intimate enough to be admitted to family confidences) named for St. Ivans Mayre of Richmond: you see, we had hoped for a son, and — well — having selected the name, we let it stand. It does quite as well for a girl as a boy, and has the merit of distinction."

There was always a pause after that announcement. A pause that was sometimes long, sometimes short:

"Then came Caroline!"

The tone and inflection depended a good deal upon Caroline herself. If, by chance, on the day the story was being told, she had thrown off her Hyde wickedness and shown her Jekyll nature, the information was apt to give the impression that Caroline was a direct dispensation of providence, but, alas, it quite as often came in a tone that closely resembled a groan.

"Our fourth daughter, Caroline," the story went on, "is a very unusual child. Full of vivacity, which sometimes develops into distinct naughtiness. Her father is the only person who really understands her, possibly because she is a Ravenel of the first water; his patience with her is really marvelous."

Then followed the debit and credit side of Caroline's nature. "She is mischievous, wilful, an unmerciful tease; she is slow to wrath, but when once aroused ——" the lifting of Mrs. Ravenel's plump hands spoke more than words.

"But on the other hand she is sympathetic to a degree; just and generous; gifted with an imagination that is equally the pride and the torment of the family."

"When Caroline takes it into her head to do a thing ——" Mrs. Ravenel always stopped there, shaking her head. No word had yet been found to describe her daughter's determination.

Often there followed a line of anecdotes that unwittingly sidetracked the story of Hope's advent in the family circle; but Hope was inclined to pale before the colorful Caroline, literally as well as figuratively.

There was always the story of how one morning in her fourth year, Caroline had escaped Maum Rachel's watchful eye and followed her mother to church, appearing in a nightgown still

dripping with the syrup from flannel cakes, swinging a soiled and dilapidated infant by a partially dissevered arm, calling joyously: "Look, Muvver, I found Long Honey!" — her own name for a doll relegated to the ash barrel.

There was the pathetic tale of the town crier who had tramped the streets for hours, his voice raised in a persistent, "Child lost! Child lost!" and a detailed description of Caroline's overtures to a goat. There were the measles, the whooping cough, ugly scratches from stray cats, sundry frights of kidnapping: all of which passed over her like a summer shower.

Doctor Ravenel was the direct antithesis of his wife: a silent, scholarly man with keen, dark eyes, always inscrutable; a whimsical mouth that belied a general sternness; a deep, musical voice and a pervading atmosphere of reliability.

Although the modest sign, "Robert E. Ravenel, Physician and Surgeon", that hung on the office side of the house announced his willingness to serve the public, his strength, or lack of it, prohibited an extensive practice. Frequent consultations and an occasional operation (some preferred trusting him even in his enfeebled state to chancing another) helped to eke out a living, and there was, of course, his pay as a retired army officer.

He lived in the anticipation of complete re-

covery, his naturally strong constitution and inherited physique contributing largely to his faith. He knew, however, that he could not hope to battle against the odds of Virginia's moist climate and was continually on the lookout for a chance to dispose of his property and establish himself in the mountains of Colorado or Arizona.

With this, be it said in all fairness, Mrs. Ravenel was in absolute accord. She loved her Southland, her undisputed social position, her old friends, but years of army life had freed her from prejudices: she knew that cultivated people could be found in a wilderness (experience had proved it), and ten or twelve years of wandering had changed her home-loving nature to nomadic independence.

At home, Mrs. Ravenel was petted and adored by an admiring household, her natural sweetness and charm penetrating every barrier. The negroes worshipped her. Her children vied with each other in attention to her; her husband (whether or not he approved of her laxness and indolence), shared in the general admiration, though he lived his live outside the narrow circle that bounded hers.

It was Leigh upon whom he depended. She took care of his office, kept his books, answered calls; saw that his instruments were cleaned

and sterilized; sometimes, in an emergency, she administered an anesthetic, or drove with him to a charity case, lending sympathy and interest.

Not that he willingly imposed upon her: often her pale face and halting step haunted him far into the night. But it was Leigh — or failure.

And, in justice to the household, it must be said that it was difficult to realize that one was imposing upon Leigh. She was so cheery, so willing, so interested — and always so humorous.

"I'm Biddy the cook," she would say with a laugh when Maum Rachel's rheumatism took her to bed; or "Alfred the butler", as she served a belated luncheon. Often she was "Jake the stoker", "Mary Jane the housemaid", "Miss Sedden the seamstress" and *always* "Mrs. Partington, the housekeeper."

But if Leigh was her father's stay and comfort, Caroline was his pride and recreation. He loved her with a consuming tenderness, watching the unfolding of her mind as a naturalist watches the blossoming of a precious bud. She was his hybrid. He understood the diverse and often incongruous elements in her make-up: from the Kirtleys she had inherited her sympathies, her understanding of human nature, a certain adaptability; from them also came charm of manner, almost a trick, in its irresistible

persuasiveness. From his own line descended the more dominant traits: a strong will, a keen mind, leadership.

He also knew the weedy spots; where to prune, where to cultivate. He was never too ill to straighten out her difficulties, to encourage her better moods and enforce the law in trying ones.

CHAPTER IV

Caroline Fares Forth

SUNRISE, to Caroline, was a new and thrilling experience. The rosy glow that brought splendor to the east decided her destination.

"We'll ride right into it, Calico," she said, leaning to pat the horse's satin shoulder. "It's so soft and billowy, like the silk rainbow shawl up in the attic that belonged to Grandmother Kirtley. You would sort of like to feel it around you."

As a rule, Caroline cared very little for nature. People interested her. Therefore she turned her attention along the way to the farmhouses, just beginning to show signs of life. Now and then a negro woman emerged from a cabin to throw out a pan of water, or a man entered a field, anxious to get an early start at his work.

The sun had scattered the lowering clouds. They shifted to the west, giving Caroline the feeling that she was riding out of storm into a new and unexplored fairyland.

She gave Calico the reins. "You choose," she whispered with another pat. "You choose the road, and I will choose the house I want to live in when I come to it."

The rose tints in the east gave place to palest gray. More people stirred. Now and then a child rushed from a farmhouse door with an energetic whoop, and once a little girl waved a salute from a tumbledown veranda.

Caroline galloped on. She came at last to a high, grass-grown field that skirted an old estate. Calico stopped at the gate.

"Think you would like to go in, would you?" she asked obligingly. "All right. I will let down the bars; but I don't think we will stay. People in big houses always have plenty of help. They wouldn't need me, I am sure."

She followed a fascinating old path through the trees by a brook, letting Calico drink from the clear stream to his heart's content; then she walked for a while beside him as he nibbled at the sweet grass. It was very still. In the oaks, birds chattered and sang, sometimes stopping to quarrel over morning duties, Caroline suspected, as they whirled and pivoted and shook their saucy little heads.

She had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile through the field when she came upon an old chest set on a well-kept mound. It was heavy

and ponderous, encased in copper bands that had grown dull and rusty.

Caroline stood before it, deeply interested. Where had she heard a story about an old chest that stood on a mound?

She remembered presently and looked about. This was — it must be — the box that held the ashes of her grandfather's friend, General Rutledge. Everybody in Warrensburg knew Rutledge Heights, and the tale of old General Rutledge who, fifty years ahead of his time, had insisted upon being cremated.

She stood for a few minutes deep in thought. Then, tying Calico to a near-by tree, she stripped from one of the branches a long, thin switch.

Calico turned an inquiring eye upon her as she applied it to the keyhole of the old box, but she was too intent to notice.

Several times the switch went in and out, turned over and swished through consecrated air. Caroline examined it as it came forth, minutely, patiently. She even procured a longer, thinner one, applying it still more dexterously. Not an ash adhered to the stripped sapling.

"It's just one of those darkey lies," she confided to Calico in disgust, flinging away the third switch. "If there were ashes there you could hear them, I reckon, even if you couldn't get them through the keyhole!"

They wandered for some time after they left Rutledge field. The farms were lying a little farther apart. Caroline began to eye them carefully.

"I love you, I love you not," she said, playing an old game with a new zest.

Finally she came to a neat white cottage peeping through two giant trees. A boy was scrubbing a scrap of a veranda, whistling a merry tune as he worked.

"That's a nice looking place," she thought. "I reckon I had better go on past it and send Calico back home: then they will think I came from the other way."

It was a little harder to say good-bye to Calico than she had thought it would be, but she took off his bridle — it was an old one made of rope — and tossing it to one side of the road ordered him home.

The boy looked up with surprise as she came down the path.

"Hello," he said pleasantly, wonder growing in his eyes.

"Good morning," Caroline replied in her best company tones.

There was a pause. Caroline hesitated to step on his clean veranda.

"Want to speak to Maw?" he inquired.

"Yes; if she is not too busy."

"She's always that," the lad answered, and Caroline's spirits rose.

She followed him to the back of the house. A small gallery — cluttered with farm instruments, an ice-box and several pairs of muddy boots set in a neat row — ran the length of the kitchen. The boy scraped his feet on a piece of rag carpet. Caroline followed his example while he went indoors.

A tall, tired-looking woman in a red-and-white striped gingham frock that made her look like a stick of peppermint candy peered out over the boy's shoulder.

"You want me?" she asked, squinting out into the sunshine.

"I would like to speak to you if you please," Caroline admitted, her heart fluttering wildly.

"Come in then. I'm busy a-bakin'. Set there, will you?"

She pulled up a reed-bottomed chair, although she went on with her work plunging doughnuts into hot fat.

"These here things is just where I can't leave 'em," she mumbled over her shoulder.

Caroline sat still until the little fat rings came out, brown and crisp. It was a nice place to sit, the kitchen was so clean and spicy, and over by the stove where the big black teakettle steamed and hummed, a great yellow cat stretched its

length on a braided rug. Caroline stooped and drew it up on her lap.

The woman turned at last with a questioning stare.

Caroline's lips trembled, then broke in their sweetest smile. "I hope the — your — husband is well," she said kindly.

It was the thing callers invariably greeted her mother with: "I hope the doctor is well," so of course it was the way to begin the present conversation.

"Fair to middlin'," the woman answered.

"And your family ——"

"'Bout as common."

"It is a wonderful autumn we are having," Caroline ventured, remembering the next step.

"A bit dampish."

From the dusk of the next room (the blinds were still drawn) two awed gray eyes feasted upon Caroline's troubled ones. She wished the boy would attend to his business. It was a little hard to stick to the weather, and she wouldn't go on until he moved.

"Sam, are them steps done?" his mother asked, following Caroline's wandering gaze.

"Yes'm."

"Then you can go down to the barn and get me the rest of them eggs. Your Paw wants johnny-cake fer dinner."

Sam reluctantly crossed the room and sauntered toward the barn.

"You had business with me?" the woman asked, glancing toward her neglected baking. "This bein' Saturday, I'm a little rushed. My man's sister, Eliza Wall, died last week, and Elmiry, my gal, had to go over and help tend the babies ——"

Eliza's misfortune was Caroline's opportunity.

"That's just what I called about," she said quickly. "Would you like a lady to help you for a while ——"

"What lady?"

Caroline laid a humble hand upon her breast.

"Me."

"You?"

"Yes."

"What kin you do? You ain't bigger'n a pint a cider."

Caroline bristled. "I can wash dishes and make beds ——"

"Where you been livin'?"

"In — in the city."

"What family?"

"And I can take care of children," Caroline went on quickly, "and run errands and play the piano a little ——"

"What wages you been gettin'?"

It was fortunate the question was put in just

that way, for it enabled Caroline to speak truthfully.

"Twenty-five cents a week," she answered unhesitatingly. That was her allowance, though ten of it always had to go to Sunday school.

The woman's doubtful glance swept Caroline's dress, her new shoes and sailor hat.

"You can do better than most of us if you can dress like that on them wages," she said skeptically, "but I am willing to raise you a quarter if you kin stay till Elmiry gits home. I'm plum give out with the cookin' and all. Maybe you can take Sally Anne offen my hands; she's cuttin', and crosser'n two sticks most of the day."

A wail from an adjoining room claimed the attention of the farmer's wife.

"My name's Mrs. Watts," she said, as she turned toward the door. "What's yourn?"

"Marcella," Caroline answered quickly. The name had been acquired on the road down the valley.

"All right, you don't look like you'd be much help, but you can lay off yer things in the parlor —that door there, and change your clothes. I'll dress the baby while you change; she don't like strangers. Then you can wheel her in the yard till I need you."

The morning passed swiftly. Sally Anne proved appreciative. She cooed and chuckled

over Caroline's funny faces (Caroline was an adept at making them), falling asleep with a smile on her lips.

"That young 'un sure knows how to tend kids," Mrs. Watts said to her husband, when he came in to wash for dinner. "She's worth fifty cents a week — if she'll stay. I got a hunch she's run away from home or something. She don't look like nothin' I've seen round these parts. She's gentry, er mighty close related."

All of which made Mr. Watts scrutinize the young "help" with puzzled eyes, as he served her to corn beef and cabbage.

More than once during the meal Caroline felt those inquiring eyes upon her and modestly dropped her own.

She noticed that when dinner was over the farmer beckoned his wife into the parlor, where he detained her for a few minutes. Returning, they gazed with renewed interest.

"Well," said Mr. Watts when he had changed his coat and run a comb through his shaggy beard, "I'm off for town. Ain't anybody round here would like to go with me, I reckon."

There was a moment's silence. Caroline, glancing up, fancied she caught a wink directed toward his wife.

"No — not unless — what's yer name — Marcelly? — wants to quit her job ——"

"Oh, no, I am satisfied if you are," "Marcelly" interrupted.

Mrs. Watts assisted her husband with the load of butter, eggs and vegetables which he carried to the city every Saturday, and returned to the kitchen.

"You can clear up the dishes," she said to Caroline, "and wash 'em over there on the table."

She laid out a handful of neatly hemmed flour sacks.

"There's yer towels, an' you'll find soft soap in the can on the shelf by the stove. Get 'em good and clean; I can't abide greasy dishes. Ain't you got any other dress but that?"

Caroline shook her head.

Mrs. Watts disappeared for a minute bringing back a faded blue cotton slip.

"Here's Elmiry's work dress; put it on," she invited.

Caroline thought that she would never come to the end of the dishes piled before her. She didn't know very much about doing dishes, anyway. Occasionally she had wiped them — under protest — for Leigh when Maum Rachel took to bed. Mrs. Watts, passing through the room, stormed when she saw the thick cups and saucers nestling beside a black pot in the greasy dishwater.

"Lord a massy," she shrilled, "I thought you

said you knew how to work!" She ran her hand down the side of the pan and extricated three forks and a spoon. "Silver, too," she sputtered. "That's great dishwashin'!"

She emptied the pan and carrying the water to the yard threw it out with a jerk.

Caroline began again with fresh water. By the time she finished, she was standing first on one foot and then the other. Her Sunday shoes were not quite "broken", and they burned her tired feet.

"Reckon you can come down with me to the milk house and churn a while," Mrs. Watts suggested, when the last dish was dried and set on the pantry shelf.

Caroline loved the milk house from the moment she came upon it: it might have been a little playhouse with its thatched roof and latched door.

And inside it was so cool and fresh, so fragrant of new cheese and sweet butter. The brown bowls that lined the spotless shelves, the shining tin pans filled to the brim with the yellowest of yellow cream, the soft red earthenware crocks pushed back against the whitewashed walls made a picture never to be forgotten.

"Oh, what a nice clean place," she said, as Mrs. Watts placed a stool before an old-fashioned churn.

But the charm of the room soon faded in weariness. Caroline, according to instruction, pumped the dasher up and down in the keg until her arms ached. Once in a while she stopped to rest, but the farmer's wife urged her on saying:

"'Never get discouraged in well doin';' that's what my mother always told me when I was little. It's comin'. See how hard the dasher pulls — the cream's thickenin'."

The butter did "come" at last. Mrs. Watts opened the keg, scooped out the yellow lumps, squeezed them free of water and began to mold them into rich golden mounds. She tossed and patted, weighed and paddled with the skill of an expert. Caroline watched her admiringly.

"I never knew before just how butter was made," she said appreciatively. "It takes lots of time, doesn't it? And its pretty when you get it into those nice round cakes."

Mrs. Watts was too tired to answer. Butter, to her, was an old story; she saw no beauty in it.

Caroline hoped that she would be invited to rest after the butter was put in the stone crocks, but Mrs. Watts' "you can peel the pertaters now for supper, and then amuse Sally Anne; this is her fussy time, long 'bout five o'clock," roused her to further effort.

The potatoes peeled and put in cold water, Sally Anne was wheeled to the farthest end of the pasture. She *was* fussy, no question about that. Nothing pleased her.

Caroline loaded the cart with flowers and pretty stones and odds and ends of toys that Mrs. Watts had sent along, but Sally Anne spurned them all.

"It won't hurt her to fuss a little," Caroline thought, after an hour's conscientious effort at entertainment, and throwing herself down in the cool, tangled grass, slept from sheer exhaustion.

She was awakened by a sudden thump beside her. Sally Anne, demanding attention, had leaped from her carriage, landing on a rock half hidden in the grass. Her piercing screams brought Mrs. Watts on a run.

"What's the matter?" the frightened woman called in a frenzied tone, before she reached the scene of disaster.

"Nothing. She just fell out of her buggy; I don't think it hurt her much. She's scared, that's all."

An ugly green and crimson bump on the baby's forehead shamed Caroline the rest of the day. She was relieved from a nurse girl's duties and set to picking chickens for Sunday's dinner.

"I can't do this," she rebelled, after trying

for several minutes. "It makes me sick. I reckon I had better be goin'."

She hadn't the remotest idea where, but a night spent in the open field under the stars would be better than the odor that penetrated from the dirty, wet fowls.

The chickens were turned over to Sam, the boy who had welcomed her in the morning.

"I think you'd better stay right on here—leastways till Watts gets back from town," the farmer's wife declared, then, noticing the drooping, dejected head, added: "If you want to, you can go up in Elmiry's room and rest for a half-hour before supper."

Caroline gratefully welcomed the suggestion and climbed the narrow attic stairs.

Elmiry's room was small, but it was clean and restful. A brilliant rag carpet half covered the floor and pretty white curtains, feather-stitched in blue, fluttered in the cool, sweet-scented breeze that floated through the window.

The bed looked lumpy, but Caroline turned back the spread and, taking off her shoes, lay down contentedly. Her head had scarcely touched the pillow before she slept — so soundly that it took several of Sam's noisy thumps on the door to rouse her. She jumped up quickly.

Twilight had crept on, and the strange room was swallowed in shadows. For a moment Caro-

line couldn't think where she was, but Sam's good-natured voice calling her to supper reminded her. She choked back a sob that rose in her throat and put on her shoes.

The family had drawn around the table when she came down stairs. Mr. Watts was extremely pleasant. He helped her to a bowl of soup and inquired as to how she enjoyed farm life.

Caroline watched him as he broke a handful of crackers into his soup and gulped the mixture noisly. She looked about. Mrs. Watts and Sam were following suit, so she crumbled hers daintily, thinking how aghast her mother would be if she could see her. She also poured her tea in the saucer of her cup and, with courtesy that was at base kindness, supped it lustily. She scarcely understood why so much noise was demanded of so simple a performance, and good taste forbade inquiry.

Her appetite seemed strangely inadequate to the array of food set before her. But everybody was kind. Now and then Sam smiled at her, pushing the apple sauce and plum butter closer, and Mrs. Watts seemed to have forgotten the baby's bruises.

They were half through the meal when Mrs. Watts said:

"I reckon you saw them parties you set out to look for this afternoon?"

Her husband nodded.

"It was — as you thought?"

"Oh, yes, I knew I was right," he replied.

"Was they much put out?"

"Right smart."

The conversation was quickly abandoned.

Sam hospitably proposed a game of jackstraws after the dishes were washed, but Caroline was too sleepy. She had all but dozed at the supper table.

"I reckon you had better go 'long to bed," Mrs. Watts said. "An' tomorrer bein' Sunday, you kin sleep late. We don't ever stir until six o'clock Sundays."

She lighted the way up the dark stairs with a tallow candle, and closing Elmiry's window, set it on the stand.

"Good night," she said kindly, as she closed the door. "You don't need to be a bit afraid. We sleep right under this room. Ain't nothin' goin' to hurt you. Don't forget to blow out the light."

"May I have the window open, please?" Caroline begged.

"Open! At night? Land sakes! You'd catch yer death. Ain't nothin' worse than night air: it's goin' to rain, anyway."

Caroline did not argue, but when the footsteps died on the stair, she stealthily lifted the rickety

frame that held a strip of cracked glass and put a stick under it.

For all she was so tired, she could not sleep. Strange sounds rose above the patter of the rain: the bark of a dog, now and then a cat's howl; a mad scampering between the thinly partitioned walls; steady resounding snores from the room below.

Her frightened eyes strained into the darkness. Somehow, in retrospect, her adventure lacked excitement. And her joy in picturing the sorrow and fright of her family faded in homesickness. All the way down the valley she had pictured Maum Rachel wringing her hands and crying, "po' li'l lamb, somebody gone toted her away; she ain't neber lef her ole Maumy on her own 'count."

She had also feasted on Leigh's swollen eyes and her mother's collapse (it was not difficult to visualize Mrs. Ravenel, propped in her snowy bed with Alison and Mayre in constant attendance) and her father ——

She had winced a little at the thought of his pale face and kind eyes. Of all the family she loved him best. As she thought of him now, sobs shook her, and it took all the pride she could muster to keep from going below and saying, "I am Doctor Ravenel's little girl, and I want you to hitch up and take me home this

minute." She hadn't the slightest desire to prolong her family's agony. She had "shown them." She was ready now to bury the hatchet and begin anew.

She fell asleep thinking how she would steal away in the morning before the family were awake and inquire her way back to Warrensburg.

But it was broad daylight when she opened her eyes and Sam was beating a lusty tattoo on on her door.

"Breakfast's ready," he announced. "Better hurry."

She was a little chagrined as she sat down to the crisp bacon and eggs, though rather glad, after all, that she had overslept; the coffee smelled so good and the biscuits Mrs. Watts brought from the oven were almost as nice as Maum Rachel's.

"You and Sam kin do the dishes — Sam'll wash," Mrs. Watts said, as they rose from the table. "I'll clean up a bit before we start to meetin'."

"Do — do you go to Warrensburg?" Caroline asked hopefully.

"Land, no—plum the other way! Warrensburg's ten miles from here."

"If you don't mind, I won't go with you. Maybe I can do something here ——"

"Oh, I reckon you'd better come along. Mr. Watts is right particular about everybody goin' to service."

Caroline dried the dishes thoughtfully.

The long day passed slowly. By the time dinner was over, she was utterly dejected. She bravely battled with tears, but often her lips trembled.

"When — when does Mr. Watts go to town again?" she inquired about dusk. Sam had lighted the lamp that hung over the kitchen table and opened a book. The sight brought a wave of homesickness. A picture swept before her longing eyes: an old darky kneeling with an armful of wood before an open fire — his gray, kinky head crimsoned by the glow; her mother seated at a table, an open book in her pretty white hands; Leigh near, with Hope squeezed in the chair beside her; on the old sofa in front of the fire, her father, resting, listening; Alison and Mayre on the hearth-rug. And over all the fire-light dancing on the rosewood piano, leaping over the faded curtains, darting to Leigh's thin hands spread on the armchair.

But one place was vacant — her place — in the bend of her father's long body: he always pushed back to give her room. She wondered if he missed her, if he were sorry about the scolding.

A thought of Willie flashed over her. She

wondered if he were worse — if he had suffered much. She hoped not. She winced a little, remembering his ankle, and unconsciously stooped and rubbed her own.

Mrs. Watts' answer brought her back with a start.

"Not afore Wednesday, I reckon. Do you, Paw?"

"Hardly."

The pent-up tears dropped from Caroline's eyes and wandered slowly down her cheeks.

Mr. Watts saw them, and although it was Sunday and "he was particular about meeting," he suggested that Sam close his book and get out the jackstraws.

Caroline played with little interest. Sam's winning was barely noticed by her until his, "Oh, shucks, a girl can't never play nothin'!" challenged her pride.

She was glad when the clock finally struck eight and the family began making preparations for bed.

Up in Elmiry's little room the tears fell thick and fast, but sleep mercifully checked them. Caroline was too weary to care whether the rain fell, cats howled, or mice scampered in the partitions. Besides, she was dreaming: dreaming that she was in her own soft bed at home; that Maumy Rachel stood beside it with a tray of hot

chocolate and cinnamon toast, a special treat when Caroline was good.

Monday was worse than Saturday, or even Sunday. Mrs. Watts washed. Caroline tended the baby, dried dishes, set the table, peeled vegetables.

But Tuesday held a surprise. A passing farmer brought news that Elmiry was ready to return home. A woman had been found to care for her uncle's children.

"Reckon you'd better hitch up 'long 'bout four o'clock, Paw, and go get her," Mrs. Watts said, her face eager with anticipation.

"Which way does he go?" Caroline asked hastily.

"T'other side a Warrensburg, 'bout a mile."

"The other side? Then he passes through, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Do you think he'd mind taking me? I — I — believe I like the city a little better and ——"

"But you hired for a week."

"I wouldn't charge you for the three days — and, besides — you will hardly need me with Elmiry coming."

"That's so. I guess maybe we can manage — what d'you think, Jim?"

Mr. Watts was very willing. He even suggested stopping at Clay and Center streets to

let Caroline out, and in her joy Caroline thought nothing of it.

She hadn't been so happy in months as she climbed into the seat beside Mr. Watts, her red bandanna clasped in one hand and a fifty-cent piece which the farmer's wife insisted she had earned held tightly in the other.

At Clay street the farmer stopped and held out a rough, knotty hand. Caroline took it respectfully.

"When you get tired of the city, come out again," he said hospitably; "come and get acquainted with Elmiry."

Caroline thanked him prettily. Then she ran lightly down the street, turning in at the side gate that marked the Kirtley mansion. The surprise that awaited her in the old house was even greater than the coming of Elmiry.

CHAPTER V

The Wanderer Returns

MAUM RACHEL was hanging out clothes. As Caroline came down the walk, Maumy put her hands to her fat, black cheeks and held back a smile.

"Howdy, Miss Car'line," she called, with half-averted face. "Howdy! Hope I see you well. Did y'all have a pleasant journey?"

Caroline passed with a toss of her head. She did not deign to notice the impertinence.

The house had a changed aspect. Caroline stood gazing up at it in astonishment. Boxes and packing cases filled the verandas; the blinds at the upstairs chambers were flung high; Caroline observed this because Leigh was always sending her to straighten them in neat, even lines.

She turned to ask Maum Rachel a question, but the smirk on the round, black face stopped her.

"Is y'come to stay awhile?" the old woman

went on, her fat sides shaking with laughter. Then, seeing Caroline's hurt face and dazed eyes, she caught the child in her arms.

"Lammie," she crooned, hugging her tighter and tighter, "lammie, lammie, your po' ole Maumy was plain scared to deaf 'bout you. Come on in to yer Maw. She jus' dyin' to see you."

Caroline dreaded meeting the family. She moved toward the house slowly.

"What are all those boxes on the gallery for, Maumy?" she asked, eyeing them wonderingly.

"Dat's fer me to know and you to fine out, honey," Rachel said with a sobered face. "Y'all better run long in an' let your Paw 'splain. Maumy ain't got time."

There was a suspicious moisture in her eyes as she turned.

"Something has happened. Tell me quickly!" Caroline stamped her foot impatiently. "Maumy, Maumy, what is it — you are crying. Is — is he worse?"

Rachel shook her head. "Go 'long in an' ask the fam'bly," she muttered, drying her tears on the hem of her apron. "Run 'long."

Doctor Ravenel was at his desk in the office. The room was in confusion. Boxes were half filled with books, chairs held draperies, pictures, odds and ends of furnishings. Leigh was at the

table, fitting instruments into cases. She turned as Caroline paused at the door.

"Well, honey," she said, and kissed her as if nothing had happened. Doctor Ravenel looked up and held out his arms. Caroline flung herself into them.

"Major," she cried, her eyes round with terror, "what has happened? Tell me, quick! What does it all mean?"

The Major drew her into his lap and smoothed her thick braids. His eyes wandered over the disorderly room.

"It means, my child, that a great many things may happen between Saturday and Tuesday. It means — that we are moving — going away — to a new, beautiful country, where Father will be well and strong ——"

He got no farther. The sunburned head burrowed into his rough tweed coat, the little shoulders heaved with sobs.

Caroline heard the whole story later: how a rich man from the West had returned to Warrensburg, his old home, and had made some sort of an exchange — given his new house in the pretty, prosperous Colorado town for the Kirtley estate; the family was moving immediately. She was still a little dazed as she wandered upstairs to her mother's bedroom.

Mrs. Ravenel's room was in perfect order. The

packing of her personal belongings had been left to the last. She looked very serene and pretty as she sat in a comfortable chair before a log fire, a book open in her lap.

"Close the door, dear," she called, as Caroline crossed the threshold. "It is very draughty with the house all open. Come give Mother a kiss."

She drew the child into her arms and patted her cheek lovingly. "Darling," she murmured, "you must never, never do such a naughty thing again."

Caroline breathed a sigh of relief, and snuggling against her mother's delicately scented laces, sighed peacefully.

But it was night before she could bring herself to ask about Willie. She and Hope were alone in the big, square bedroom. Judy had had turned back the covers on the bed and set out two pairs of blue slippers. Never had a bed looked so good to Caroline.

"How's Willie Boland?" she casually asked as she began to disrobe.

Hope answered behind a yawn.

"Oh, he's coming along nicely. I went over to see him this afternoon and took him some cake. He was sitting up. I don't think he minds his ankle being hurt at all. Everybody brings him things: books and goodies and presents."

It was after the light was out and Hope had

turned her face to the wall that Caroline ventured another question:

"Were they much scared, Hopie, when — when they found I had gone — the other morning? Did anybody cry — or anything?"

Hope smothered another yawn.

"Oh, a little — at first. But when Mr. Watts came in — he used to be our vegetable man, you know — and said you were at his place, working, why father said to let you stay and work — it would do you good — he said ——"

Caroline turned her back upon Hope with a flaunt that took the bedding with her. A disgusted "Humph!" cut the sentence.

"I don't want to hear what he said," came the icy retort. "You can keep it to yourself!"

Under the cover of darkness Hope smiled broadly.

The breaking up of an old home is more heartrending than it is exciting. From attic to cellar the Kirtley house was slowly and systematically dismantled. Boxes and barrels covered gallery and veranda. Rufus hammered and nailed down covers, gave instructions to Judy, made trips to town for packing materials, all with a face so sober that it brought tears to the eyes of sympathetic little Caroline.

"Oh, Uncle Rufus," she said with a sigh, "I don't see how in the world the Major is going

to get along without you. Who's going to drive him when he makes calls ——"

"I reckon you is, Missy," the old man said, with a tender smile. "I reckon y'all have to be Miss Car'line and ole Rufus all in one, I specs ——"

"And who's going to blacken his shoes and brush his things and — cut wood and build fires and ——"

"Maybe they don't have fires out thar in the mountains."

"Of course they have fires, Rufus."

"Mebby so, Missy, mebby so."

The conversation would go on and on, while Caroline fetched and carried for the old man, sometimes smuggling in a discarded toy or forbidden trinket while his woolly head was turned from his boxes.

Maum Rachel's face was also long and troubled.

"I specs I gwine to come back when I gits 'em all settled out thar," she said to Rufus. "I ain't goin' to be happy nowhar but in ole Virginny. I knows that — but I can't desert Miss Em'bly. *Why, Miss Em'bly war my baby.* She opened them pretty blue eyes of hern in my ole black face — yessir — ole Doctor Breeton done put her in my arms first. Seems lak it was yisterday when I cum to think 'bout it. I was just a li'l'

over twenty, but I knew a heap 'bout chillun. Then I nussed Miss Leigh, God bless her sweet heart, and Miss Alison and Miss Mayre, and that li'l', no-count scamp, Miss Car'line, and my *li'l'* Miss. I ain't gwine to go back on 'em now. I'se gwine 'long."

And Rufus would bend lower over his tasks, sometimes raising an arm to drag a coat sleeve across his eyes, but he said little.

The night before the lower rooms were cleared for packing, Mrs. Ravenel gathered her children in the faded blue drawing-room. Leigh, Alison and Mayre sank down on the old sofa that had held several generations of Kirtleys. Caroline and Hope sat with their mother on a smaller one. It was a solemn and impressive moment.

"I want you to look around, children," Mrs. Ravenel said in a voice broken with emotion, "so that you may remember the home of your ancestors. It is no longer ours, but we must always treasure it in memory."

Caroline's large, wistful eyes traveled the length of the picturesque old room, her glance caressing each familiar object: the heavy card tables either side of the fireplace, the brass sconces on the wall above; the pretentious canvases in their tarnished gilt frames; the handsome old chairs; the faded gray-blue carpet with its bouquets of pale pink roses. She had always

loved the carpet, though her mother thought it inexcusably shabby.

She feasted for a while, then rising, stood in the doorway, looking across the hall into the dining-room. Again her eyes swept the furnishings: the great square table with its heavy legs and claw feet; the high, straight-backed chairs; the towering mahogany cupboard filled with shining glass and china; the ponderous, carved sideboard that held cut-glass decanters and silver fruit dishes.

Suddenly she turned, and without a word rushed up the broad stairs and into her own room, where she remained for some time behind a locked door.

But there were many happy hours during those last few weeks: visits to friends; dinner parties to which the young people were invited; farewell entertainments.

Willie was improving rapidly. Caroline gathered courage and went to see him one day. She found him propped in a great easy chair before a sunny bay window, his foot raised on a chair in front of him.

"I am dreadfully sorry, Willie," she said, when his mother left them alone for a minute. "I — I didn't mean to have you get hurt ——"

To which Willie replied irrelevantly, "Forget it! Nobody ever thought of blaming you."

"I 'spect it was Mamie Jilsen, maybe — she got excited ——"

"T'wasn't anybody. I just fell — that's all — anybody's apt to, climbing things. — Say, Caroline, I envy you those mountains out in Colorado. Gee, but I would like to get up to the top of them once. What do you suppose is on the other side?"

"I will write and tell you, Willie — and you must write to me. Tell me everything about the crowd. You mustn't forget anybody, the Jilsens or the Ramseys or the McFees. I like them all."

And Willie, one year Caroline's senior, and more or less under the spell of her "speckled" eyes, promised faithfully.

The eventful day came at last, the day when the old house was to be closed and barred.

"I reckon we won't know the place if we ever come back; the new people are going to build it all over," Caroline said to Maum Rachel. They were standing in the long, bright kitchen. Maum Rachel had been instructed to lock up and bring Caroline to the hotel.

The old negress did not speak for a moment. When she did, her tones were low and indistinct.

"I — I specs not, honey."

"It will all be different, Maum Rachel."

The gray head nodded. For a minute the striking of the old clock was the only sound that

marred the stillness. Caroline counted the strokes: one, two, three, four.

"Hadn't you better wind it, Maumy?" she asked.

"What fur, Missy? They ain't nobody to care."

But she moved across the room and took the key from a hook. Caroline listened to the familiar grind.

"Maumy ——"

"Yes, honey?"

"It will go on ticking until Sunday, won't it?"

"Yes, lammie."

"And then it will stop — *still.*"

"Yes, it'll stop."

"And there won't be anybody to start it again. Won't it be lonesome, Maumy, the old clock ——"

Through a veil of tears Maum Rachel looked at the scarred face with its straight, pointing hands, the heavy brass pendulum.

"It didn't seem right to take the old one in the hall — Grandfather Kirtley's — just because it was tall and handsome, and leave this, did it, Maumy? I told Major so, but he said we had to draw the line somewhere. Tell me about the day Jerusha cooked mother's wedding breakfast by it, Maumy, just once more — and how it stopped at the very minute Jerusha died. Please, while I can look at it."

Rachel sat down and drew Caroline within the bend of her arm.

"Dat was a long time ago, chile — a long, long time ago — but I bet Ole Time he ain't fergot." She looked at the clock as if she expected a nod to corroborate her statement. "De wedding it was at noon, and de breakfas' it was to be at one promp'! Jerusha she bake de ham and cook de turkey, and fix de trimmin's, keepin' her eye on Ole Time yander, when all of a sudden she hear de weddin' folks a-comin' back from de church, and it war only twelve o'clock — yes'm, twelve o'clock — and de turkey wa'nt brown or de biscuits beat, or de sweet taters done — or nothin'! Jerusha she got up on a chair an put her head close to Ole Time thar, and bless you, he'd done stopped short — yes'm — somepin' in him had broke — broke down. *Just at twelve, precise!*"

"What made it break, Maumy, do you 'spose — just then?"

"What I 'spose? *I know,* honey. It war a sure sign. Ole Time was a-trying to tell us thar war trouble ahead — your Paw ——" she stopped suddenly.

"And the other time, Maumy, when Jerusha died ——"

"They ain't nothin' to tell 'bout dat. He jes' naturally stopped — out'n respect, till the fu-

neral was over — just like closin' up a store or ——"

'Oh, Maumy," came the child's doubting tones.

"Fac', honey. Clocks know a heap, always watchin' folks' doin's."

"Some day I am going to send for him, Maumy," Caroline whispered softly. "Maybe Mr. Lee" — Mr. Lee was the new owner — "would give him to me. When I get to Colorado, I will write him about it. I reckon we had better be going now."

She paused in the doorway. "Good-bye, dear old Mr. Time," she said, with a little choke in her voice. "Don't you feel bad. You aren't really forgotten — you are just keepin' watch for awhile."

She blew a fluttering kiss toward the seamy white face and went to find Rufus.

And Maum Rachel, with a long, trembling sigh, turned the lock in the worn, battered door.

CHAPTER VI

The New Home

"MOTHER, I don't like it! I don't like it at all."

Mayre's doleful face (replica of her mother's in color and outline) was a picture of dismay.

The long journey from the South was over; and the family had strolled up the wide, wind-swept avenue that led to the new home.

Caroline, her hand in her father's, frowned.

"Wait until you've seen the inside before you begin to find fault; you don't live on the outside," she said, watching her father's face for a shade of disappointment.

"I think it is very like the photograph, Mayre," he declared cheerfully.

"But it's painted red, and I hate red. It was never meant for anything but the sunsets and ——"

"The color seems to be in vogue here," Mrs. Ravenel remarked, looking about. "And it is a very rich, dark red; quite effective too. But I know how you feel, Mayre dear, you are so

sensitive to color." She put an arm around the shuddering girl and patted her shoulder.

"Fiddlesticks!" The word came in disgust.

"Caroline!"

"Oh, Mother, I beg your pardon. I wasn't speaking to you. Mayre makes me sick, always putting on airs about things and ——"

A gentle squeeze of the hand in her own stopped the sentence.

It was an odd-looking house, set a little apart from its neighbors. Its square tower and ornate trimmings cheapened what was otherwise a very comfortable, well-planned dwelling.

"That awful thing on the side—it makes one think of a fire station — that tower ——"

"That's where the stairs go up, Mayre," Alison suggested. "I think it's rather nice."

"Can't you imagine what the view would be from those high windows," Leigh said, lifting her eyes. "I suspect it's an observatory."

Maum Rachel and Judy, with bulging eyes and heavy hearts, had followed the procession up the street.

Doctor Ravenel turned from the house, and for a moment stood looking at the giant mountains that walled the valley to the west.

"Well, Rachel," he said at last, "what do you think of all this?" He waved a hand toward the Rockies.

"I — I specs hit's mighty fine fer them 'at likes it, Marsa; they's terrible gran', dem old rocks, but ——"

She stopped, and shading her eyes with her hand, peered closer.

"But — don't they sort'r shet out the view, Marsa? What's behine 'em? Dat's what I want a know!"

Even Mayre joined in the laugh that followed, and the Doctor opened the front door.

"Oh, dear, more red," Mayre said, as she viewed the showy octagonal hall.

"There was a young person named Mayre
Who fussed like the very old Harry,"

sang Caroline in a tone that echoed through the empty house:

"The blue eyes in her head
Saw everything red ——"

"Children!"

This fussy young person ——"

"Caroline!"

"Called Mayre!"

"It is so nice to have a budding poet in the family," Mayre sighed, and turned her attention to the parlors.

The rooms opened by means of sliding doors. French windows led to the broad veranda.

"How charming!" Leigh exclaimed, as she opened one and again caught sight of the moun-

tains. "Oh, Mother, I don't care if the house is — gingerbready — so long as we have these rooms. Think how pretty they will be when our furniture comes,— the sofa before the fireplace ——"

"It's built of red sandstone — the fireplace — isn't it?" began Mayre.

"Her lovely blue eyes never held a surprise ——"

"Caroline! You may desist!" Mrs. Ravenel's tone were too gentle to be effective.

"They saw only red — red ——"

"Mother, can't she stop!"

"You stop, then ——"

Doctor Ravenel raised a finger. Words were unnecessary. The teasing ceased.

On the other side of the hall stretched an imposing dining room; it faced a garden that showed signs of neglect. Mayre shuddered again, but said nothing. The room was papered in blue that bordered on indigo; a fantastic pattern flecked with gold. But opening from the larger room was a smaller one, finished in ivory, even to the table and chairs.

"A breakfast room! How darling!" Alison cried. Mayre's face brightened.

"I shall have all my meals here," she declared, "and I will arrange the garden. I think roses would do well — it's east, isn't it? Yellow Har-

risons and Sweetbriar, perhaps a Baltimore Belle or two. And over there," she pointed a slender artist's finger, "daffodils and clumps of iris and perhaps some monkshoods and zinnias, and — oh, yes, a flowering almond, and against the lattice, honeysuckle ——"

"I wouldn't count too much on the flowers; the season is short here," her father interrupted.

"But some one had a garden; look at the beds — such humpy ones; no wonder flowers wouldn't grow, poor things."

Back of the living rooms were the kitchen, pantries, closets and provision rooms. Maum Rachel's eyes widened with surprise as she viewed.

"Hit's handy," she declared, "but hit means a lot a cleanin', Miss Em'bly. Look at dat gallery crost de back, and de size ob de kitchen. I ain't gwine have no chillun trackin' hit up." She eyed Caroline defiantly.

The red wall paper followed the hall in its devious wanderings. Caroline paused on the first stair landing.

"There's a place just like we had at home for Aunt Caroline," she remarked, observing the niche in the wall. "It looks as if it were made for a portrait."

"Hurrah for Great-aunt," Alison said, taking the stairs at a bound. "She'll tone up the hall

with her elegance. I wonder if her health is good."

"And Grandfather can hang down there," Mayre said, half closing her eyes to get the effect of the portrait in the lower hall. "Yes, he will be lovely there, opposite the entrance. The light is fine."

"And callers can say, as they enter, 'Ahem, F. F. V's; these people are worth cultivating.' "

"Alison, that is just a little — unnecessary," Mrs. Ravenel admonished, though her face reflected pride. "I hope that people will not have to see our forbears to know that we are gentlewomen."

"Better lock Caroline in the cellar, then," Mayre suggested, having awaited revenge.

Maum Rachel nodded her kinky head.

"Caroline is going to be very careful about choosing her friends here," Mrs. Ravenel continued, with a hopeful smile. "Aren't you, darling? You realize that our happiness depends so much upon our friendships — we want refined associates."

Caroline repeated the word after her: refined. "What does it mean?" she asked, her brows in a pucker.

"Refined? Why, it means — polish, dear."

"Something you put on the outside of you?"

"No — scarcely that."

"Something like — fine?"

"More than that — re-fined. Made better."

"Isn't it enough to be fine ——"

"My dear, we will discuss the word at another time."

They had reached the second floor, continuing the inspection of the chambers.

"What lovely rooms for you and Father," Leigh called, opening the door to the front. "Two splendid ones with the bath between. What more could one ask?"

"Nothing but this," Alison shouted from the end of the hall. "Do come and see this love of a door with a mirror in it, and the darlingest pink paper on the wall. Oh, Mother, could Mayre and I have this room?"

The family came trooping.

"But you can't see the mountains, Alison. I want the view ——"

"And I want the mirror," Alison insisted, pirouetting before it.

"The room is too small for two," Mrs. Ravenel said, and added, "It will be charming for Leigh. Do you not like it, dear? In the spring you can look down on Mayre's garden."

Leigh's face colored warmly. "I should love it, Mother dear," she said, "and Alison may dress here whenever she likes."

There were two good-sized rooms across the

hall. Alison and Mayre decided on the one to the front. Caroline and Hope took the one just back.

Caroline lingered in her room after the family had passed on. She went over to the window, and opening it, looked out. A handsome house set in the midst of formal gardens and winding paths stood but a stone's throw away. It was an imposing place. A girl of Caroline's own age was walking down the carriage road with a dog in leash.

Despite her mother's admonitions in regard to chance acquaintances, Caroline made a cup of her hands and gave a cordial hello!

The girl glanced up. Caroline added a smile and a wave to the hello, but the young person merely dropped her eyes, shrugged, and passed into a near-by pergola.

"Snubby, isn't she," Caroline muttered, closing the window. Then, race pride getting the better of democracy, she added, "But of course she didn't know I was a Kirtley, so I will have to overlook it."

The family had gone downstairs to decide on Doctor Ravenel's office quarter, and Caroline took the steps leading to the tower. She drew her breath sharply as she opened the door to the small, box-like room that gave to the west. On two sides there were windows; the view of the

mountains, circling away to the valley, was clear and unobstructed.

Something like a thrill shot through her as she looked out into the sun-drenched silence. At the foot of the mountains lay the peaceful village.

"That old fellow over there" — she was looking on a mammoth peak — "is a giant with his arms stretched wide — and — these people are his subjects. I am one of them now," she thought, making her quick salute. "Command me, Mighty King!" Her joyous laugh, floating with the soft wind, echoed back.

She was so entranced that she did not hear her father enter. He slipped her hand into his, and together they stood gazing at the marvelous panorama.

"Major, it's — it's wonderful, isn't it? It — it sort of takes away my breath."

Doctor Ravenel drank in the fresh, pure air with relish.

"You are thousands of feet nearer the sky than you were at home, honey; that makes you breathe faster. And you ran up-stairs — you mustn't do that any more until you are acclimated."

Caroline put her hand over her heart; it was racing madly.

"It wasn't just — just that I couldn't get my

breath — I felt choked, Major — as if — as if I couldn't speak — couldn't ——"

She broke off, unable to make herself understood. Years later she realized that her madly beating heart was not only responding to altitude but to the splendor of the Rockies.

"Did you find a place for your office?" she inquired presently.

"Yes, I shall take the back parlor. Fortunately there is a small room off from it, originally meant for a den, with a door opening to the veranda. The arrangement could scarcely be better."

"Doesn't it seem sometimes as if things were planned for people?" she asked, with wisdom beyond her years. "I am going to love this place. I like every inch of it—red paper and everything. I am so glad I wasn't born Mayre, Major. I might have been, you know, if I had come third instead of fourth, mightn't I? It must be dreadful to hate a color so ——"

A softly cushioned bench ran around the windows. Doctor Ravenel sat down and drew Caroline within his arm.

"You must be very patient with Mayre, dear," he said. "Some people are so sensitively organized that a color annoys almost beyond reason. It is not a whim with Mayre; she is quite sincere. I shall have the hall changed as soon as possible.

It will be soothing to all of us. I, myself, dislike violent colors."

As they chatted, the sun dropped behind the peak. A crimson flush followed, and a moment later the sky was a mass of color. The wind rose higher, tearing down the street, bending the cottonwood trees, stripping them of their last leaves.

Doctor Ravenel buttoned his coat; an evening chill had fallen. "I think we had better get back to the hotel," he said.

Caroline moved from the window slowly. She wanted to remain a little longer, to watch the glow fade in the west, the wind scampering after it.

Below, the family had huddled together on the piazza. Maum Rachel, holding down her skirts with her fat, black hands, shook her head rebelliously.

"Ef hit's gwine blow like this all de time, y'all kin send me back to Virginny. I don't want my haid to part company wif my neack yet a while. I don't like win', and them ole hills yander, they look lak they was up to debilment. I ain't gwine trust 'em. No, m'am! They done got sompin' up their sleeve to spring on folks — lightnin' er slycoons."

She rolled her black eyes until the whites were uppermost and, though Doctor Ravenel assured

her that cyclones were usually confined to flat country, she kept her gaze from "the hills" until they reached the hotel.

CHAPTER VII

Adjustments

IT takes longer to settle a house than to dismantle it. A month passed before the new dwelling became a home.

The quaint old Kirtley furniture obliterated many of the architect's queer fancies, and the hall newly tinted (Caroline said it looked like coffee with cream in it), provided an excellent background for the portraits.

"I do wish we could have new rugs," Mayre sighed, "but I would a heap rather have bare floors than the old carpets. And hard wood is sanitary!"

Upstairs the bright, sunny rooms were fresh and comfortable, Leigh's especially. A wide couch (transformed at night into a bed), a deep willow chair and an old rosewood desk between the windows gave it the air of a sitting room, which indeed it was.

"It is the prettiest spot in the house, Sister," Caroline said, her eyes sweeping the one well-chosen picture that adorned the wall, the Martha Washington sewing table, and the worsted

sampler that hung above it, remnant of Grandmother Kirtley's handiwork.

And through the windows, nearly always open, could be seen the wide sweep of avenue with its stately procession of carriages, tandems and dog-carts, their high-seated drivers in livery, — such unique turnouts, and so distinctive, that often Leigh dropped her mending to watch them.

"It is almost like living in a foreign city," Alison said to her mother. "You see people from all over the world. But it is sad to think so many of them have had to leave their homes to find health."

"It ought to be an excellent place for physicians," Leigh thought.

Doctor Ravenel had hung his sign on the west veranda, but patients were slow in calling. He had also bought a comfortable, second-hand phaeton and a fat, lazy horse, but so far Selah was driven only for pleasure.

School was the all-absorbing topic in the family during that first month, for the Ravenel children knew nothing of public schools, having been taught entirely by governesses.

Alison and Mayre attended the high school, a square, stone building six or eight blocks down the street. Caroline and Hope went to the same building, the lower floor being used for grammar grades.

The four girls, neat and attractive in their blue serges and white linen collars, accompanied by a sprightly colored maid (Mrs. Ravenel would not have thought of allowing them on the streets alone) were distinctly noticeable as they wended their way southward each morning. Many a head turned to watch them.

It was Caroline who first rebelled about Judy's watchful care. "It makes us look like babies," she pouted. "Everybody turns around to look at us. Please, Mother, let us go to school alone." Doctor Ravenel agreed with Caroline.

Mrs. Ravenel finally surrendered, setting Judy to other tasks in the morning, but she never failed to say with her good-bye kisses, "Do not allow any one to address you, children, under any circumstances!"

Caroline avoided disobedience by speaking first.

She had at last made the acquaintance of the girl in the house across the way. There was no fence between the yards, so that it was a simple matter to stroll leisurely across and say "Good morning."

"Good morning," the girl had answered pleasantly, moving to make a place on the bench beside her.

"I am Caroline Ravenel," was the next step. "We've just moved here from the South, and I

get awfully lonesome. Don't you want to come over and play awhile?"

"Can't you stay here?"

Caroline glanced homeward.

"I guess I can," she answered.

"I have made a friend," she said a few hours later, when she returned to her own fireside.

Mrs. Ravenel looked up quickly.

"Who is it, dear?" she asked.

"The girl next door. She's perfectly lovely. She can sit on her hair when it's down, it's so long, and she has a dog named Viking."

"What is her name?"

"Briggs, I think. I can't just remember. They call her Kathleen. They are very nice people — and rich."

"How did you find that out?" Mayre asked.

"She said so."

"Said they were rich!"

"Yes; her father made a pile of money up in a place called Cripple Creek, where they take the gold right out of the ground in a bucket. I'm going to tell Major about it."

"What is her father's business?" Alison asked. It was the hour before dinner, and the family had gathered before the fire.

"He used to be a carpenter, but now he's a——" Caroline paused for a minute, her brows drawn in a frown.

"A carpenter!" Alison's tones were patronizing.

"Yes — what's wrong about that?"

"Carpenters are — are sort of lowly people, Caroline."

"I know — like Jesus."

There was a moment's silence.

"But he's not that now. I am trying to think what she said. Oh, yes, I know. Now, he's a banker. A wholesale banker."

"A wholesale — what?"

"Banker."

"You must mean baker, dear."

"No, I don't. They have a lovely house. Much bigger than this. And new furniture. It shines. I told her about our being Kirtleys. I guess that's why she said they were rich. I said at home it was wonderful to be a Kirtley. Everybody looked up to you —— "

"My dear child, you did not say that!" Mrs. Ravenel gasped.

"Somebody had to tell it," Caroline remarked, stifling a yawn. "How would folks know? I told Kathleen to come over and I would show her my grandfather's picture, and my aunt that's lots richer than they are, and is going to leave me her fortune some day —— "

"Will you bring me my smelling salts, Mayre darling?" Mrs. Ravenel asked, relaxing in her

chair. "Your father must talk to Caroline. I seem to make no impression ——"

"That was what I was trying to do, but nobody seems to 'preciate it," Caroline said and flounced out of the room.

As the winter drew on, other friends were added. Mildred Berne, who lived in the little house in the lot back, and Frances Kingdon who sat behind Caroline in school. Mayre and Alison were also making acquaintances slowly, as became Kirtleys.

Mrs. Ravenel and Leigh were not so fortunate. As the days lengthened, they depended more and more upon each other for companionship, joining Doctor Ravenel on the sunny veranda when the weather permitted, or before the cosy fire in the drawing-room.

Doctor Ravenel was gaining daily. The clean, stimulating air had put new life into him. There were times when he walked down the avenue without a tremor of fatigue. He had abandoned the front bedchamber and pitched a tent in the back yard. There he slept in all kinds of weather, the flap of his domicile open to the elements. It was suicidal, his wife thought, yet he gained strength rapidly.

Mrs. Ravenel missed her friends sadly. Caroline, coming in unawares one day, found her very much depressed.

"What makes Mother look so sad, Leigh?" she asked, with a catch in her voice.

"I think she gets a little lonely, perhaps. It is hard to give up one's old friends, and for some unknown reason people are very slow about calling."

"Kathleen says it is because they think nobody is going to stay long here. People come and go, all the time; you make a friend and then lose her. That hurts too."

Caroline pondered over her mother's situation for some days. Finally she determined to adjust the difficulty.

She returned from school one afternoon quite late. Leigh was anxiously peering down the street when she saw the brown head bobbing around the corner.

"Where have you been, dear? Sister has been alarmed ——"

Caroline laid a finger on her lip. "Sh," she said. "Come upstairs."

She stopped in her own room to leave her hat and coat. When she entered Leigh's sunny quarters she was wearing a broad smile.

"Sit down and I will tell you," she commanded, pushing her sister into the wicker chair by the window. "You know the other day when I found Mother so — so unhappy — well — I knew something had to be done, or she'd be want-

ing to go back to Virginia. So I thought up a plan."

She bent closer, her small, round face lighting up in anticipation of her sister's surprise. "You see, I got to thinking about how she used to love to sit on the veranda at home and tell Mrs. Fairfield and Miss Rose and Mrs. Bolling about us — how we were borned — you in Massachusetts, which always made her feel so bad, and me in Vermont, and Mayre in the Philippines, which was most as bad ——"

"Yes, dear, and what did you do?" Leigh asked with bated breath.

"So I ——" Caroline gave a little chuckle, eloquent of satisfaction, "I thought of a way to make people call, I ——"

"You what?" Leigh leaned closer. "Tell me quickly; what did you do?"

"I'm trying to tell you, Sister; don't get so excited. I took some of her calling cards, those nice ones that say 'Mrs. Robert Ellington Ravenel' on them, and I picked out six of the best-looking houses around here — just six — I know Mother doesn't care for many people, and I put one under each door ——"

"Caroline!" Leigh had risen, pale and angry before the astonished child. "Caroline! You didn't! You could not have been so naughty."

"Naughty? Why, what's naughty about that?

Every one of those people will owe her a call. I had a funny time at one place. I thought I heard some one coming, so I held on to the card—and then somebody took hold of it on the other side of the door, and we kept seesawing, like this ——" the chuckle rose to a giggle.

The color leaped into Leigh's face again. She looked at Caroline in bewilderment. "I think," she said slowly, "I think sometimes Maumy Rachel is right; you are possessed of something! Do you know what you have done? You have disgraced Mother so that no one will call. No one! We are strangers here. We have no right to thrust ourselves upon people."

The light went out of Caroline's face.

"Oh, Leigh, I only wanted to help — I — what can I do about it?"

"I don't know. I shall have to think. But you must not tell Mother. Not at present. It would make her positively ill."

Caroline left the room very much in the manner of a puppy that had brought a stick and been punished for it.

The next morning being Saturday, she was somewhat surprised to find Leigh hovering over her bed at rather an early hour. The children were permitted to sleep late on holidays. Doctor Ravenel insisted upon it

"Get dressed and come into my room at once,"

Leigh commanded. "Put on your school clothes."

When Caroline appeared at the door across the hall, Leigh pulled her into the room quickly.

"If the girls ask where you are going, you may say I am sending you on an errand," she said.

"All right. Where am I going?"

"You are going to each of the houses where you left those cards yesterday and ask for them. Do you understand? Ask for them!"

"What shall I say I want them for?"

"You may say that you made a mistake. You will not be far from the truth."

"Oh, Leigh, that will be hard to do. Couldn't you go?"

"I? Scarcely. Go at once and don't loiter."

From behind her own blind, Leigh watched the dejected little figure as it lagged up the street. Annoyed as she was. she could scarcely repress a smile.

A half-hour passed and Caroline did not return. Another went slowly by. Leigh put on her hat and coat and walked a block or two.

Presently she saw Caroline skipping down the street. In her hand she held five begrimed pieces of cardboard. Leigh counted them.

"Where is the other?" she demanded.

"The lady couldn't find it, but it didn't matter. She was out on her front porch, and I explained, so she understood. She asked me to sit a while

with her. We had a lovely time. She asked about you and Mother and the Major. She said she had seen us in church."

A few days later, Leigh, coming in from a walk, found a very charming looking woman chatting with her mother in the drawing-room. Maum Rachel, in her best cap and apron, was serving tea.

"Mrs. Ludlow, dear," her mother said, in presenting the guest.

"I know your sister," Mrs. Ludlow said, extending a cordial hand. "The irresistible little brown one who calls her father 'Major.' I was just saying to your mother that I hope you will let us borrow her often. Unfortunately, my girls — are boys!"

After all, Caroline had helped.

CHAPTER VIII

Old Mr. Time

WINTER in Colorado, the Ravenel family decided, was a thing of moods and jests. Often they awakened to find the snow beating against the window panes with such force that they arose in alarm. But in an hour's time, the sun had pierced the mass of clouds hovering to the north and dried the sidewalks so that rubbers were superfluous. Yet there were times when the old Peak drew his white hood closer about his ears and winked at "his subjects."

Maumy Rachel seemed to sense those sportive moods.

"Y'all better look out this mawnin'," she would say as the girls started for school. "I'se gwine put sompin' extry in yer lunch basket. Lord knows when y'll get home agin. Mebby never. I don't lak the looks of the ole man up yander. He got a bad eye!"

"He's an old fraud," Caroline declared. "Kathleen says they haven't had any sledding

here since goodness knows when. He's always making such a rumpus, but it never amounts to anything. I want some sleigh-riding and skating."

"Y' jes' wait, Missy," was Rachel's warning. "Don't be too sassy. I spec he's got an ear out, if he does wear a nightcap."

All of which showed that the family had fallen in line with the populace and looked upon the old monster as a weather king.

There came a day, just before Christmas, when he went on what Rachel called a "bust." He acted so badly that she went into her room and hid between two feather beds until he regained his senses. The wind began in the morning, racing up the street, chasing the tumbleweeds and scattering the dust on Judy's clean windows. Snow began to fall; lightly at first, then dropping in such big, feathery balls that the family flocked to the front of the house to watch the storm.

There was no school. The wind forbade walking; the snow became a blinding mass.

About noon Doctor Ravenel's telephone bell rang. Leigh answered. It was a call to a desperately sick child on the west side of town.

"You can't possibly go, Father," Leigh said, turning toward him anxiously. "You would have to ride into the storm — it's all from the

west — and you would be taking a frightful chance with your health."

"I must go as soon as it clears," he answered. "They are evidently very poor people, and every one has refused assistance."

It was three o'clock before the storm spent itself. On the streets the snow lay in a thick pall, drifting, in places, higher than a man's head. The Peak had donned his long, white mantle.

Leigh was not well, so her father refused her offer to accompany him. "I shall take Caroline," he said, to the child's great joy. "She can hold Selah while I make the call."

Rachel, coming out of seclusion, brought hot bricks and a warm buffalo robe (Mr. Lee had kindly left it in the attic), mumbling her disapproval.

"Marsa's gwine kill hisself for these po' white trash," she said to Judy. "Ef hit'd bin somebody wo'th a dollar, he'd a tole 'em to wait till mawnin' " — which was the truth.

It was all Selah could do to pull through the snow, particularly in the outskirts of town where drivers had not yet ventured.

As they neared the location that had been given him, Doctor Ravenel began to look about anxiously. They passed the last house on the street and started up a long hill that led to a few scattered tents well on the rim. Selah pulled

valiantly, stopping now and then to get her wind, or to try a cautious foot in the white blanket that spread before her.

"This must be the place," Doctor Ravenel said, stopping at a tent boarded halfway up the sides.

Caroline gave a gasp of surprise.

"Oh, Major, not there!" she cried. "Why, anybody would die in a place like that! They would freeze to death."

Her father shook his head as he pulled a blanket from under the seat to cover Selah. Then he tucked the robe about Caroline until only her golden-brown eyes sparkled above. There was no need to hold the reins. Selah drooped in her tracks.

Ten minutes passed, and the doctor lingered. Ten more. Caroline fidgeted under the robe. Her curiosity finally got the better of her. She wanted to know what was going on in that miserable make-believe of a house.

She slipped out of the phaeton and edged around to the back, sinking into the snow above her knees as she went. As she had hoped, there was a window, a small, inadequate affair, but near enough to the ground to afford a peep within. For a moment she forgot cold and discomfort in what she saw.

On a pallet made of rags and straw lay a girl of about her own age, tossing and moaning with

delirium. A woman knelt beside her, caressing the hot forehead, trying to stay the nervous, outflung hands. The Major sat near, watching the child, sometimes catching at the waving hands, holding them for an instant, his fingers on the racing pulse. His eyes were troubled.

Beyond the woman stood a sheet-iron stove, cold as the cheerless room. Caroline saw her father button his coat across his chest and turn to the woman. She shook her head in answer to his question and turned away her face.

Caroline could stand no more. She trudged back through the snow and cuddled under the black robe. When her father came out he was very silent.

They had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile when Selah stopped before a comfortable house. Doctor Ravenel rang the doorbell. He stood for a moment speaking with a kind, motherly looking woman. She went into the house and came back with a scuttle of coal and an armful of wood.

Up the hill Selah plodded again. This time the Major was not so long. He looked relieved when he came back.

"Were — were they — cold, Major?"

"Very, Caroline."

"I know — I peeked in the window at the back. You were gone so long."

Instead of scolding, he looked at her gravely.

"I am rather glad that you did," he said. "It will not hurt you to know how others suffer. You have been sheltered, thank God. That poor baby in there ——"

He did not finish the sentence.

"But, Major, you will make her well. You can do everything."

"I shall try, Caroline. But she must have a great many things. Warm clothes and food, a better bed. I wonder if you would be willing to give up a part of your Christmas — the tree, perhaps, and ——"

Caroline's eyes glowed. "Oh, could I?" she said, and her voice took on its sweetest cadence. "Could I, Major; would you let me ?"

"We'll talk with mother about it."

Despite the heavy storm, Christmas day broke bright and clear. The sun blazed down on the old Peak, aiming straight at his snowy hood. Doctor Ravenel called Maum Rachel to see him, he looked so friendly.

The servants had risen early. Caroline heard Judy at Leigh's door long before breakfast time, calling, "Christmas gif! Miss Leigh, Christmas gif!" And then Maum Rachel's deeper tones: "Christmas gif! Miss Em'bly. Christmas gif!"

And yet, it scarcely seemed like Christmas when the family congregated in the drawing-

room before breakfast, as was the usual custom. Here, in the land of pines, there was no Christmas tree; but red berries nodded cheerfully in copper jardinieres and a glowing fire crackled on the hearth.

"It doesn't seem in the least like Christmas," Mayre said to her mother, "away from all our friends — and no celebration."

"We are all together, darling, and your father is gaining every day. Is not that enough?"

"It's everything!" Caroline had overheard the remark and cut in as usual. "And I would a heap rather give our money to those poor people on the west side than to have a tree."

Mrs. Ravenel stooped and kissed the hot cheeks.

"It is better to give than to receive," she murmured softly.

There had been a few gifts, to be sure, mere reminders of the day: a sketching portfolio for Mayre, a new blouse for Alison, writing paper for Caroline, who was always scribbling letters to her friends at home, a new doll for Hope.

The servants too, had been remembered, and while pleased with their gifts, their faces held a homesick, longing expression.

The early morning brought a pleasant surprise. The express wagon stopped in front of the house and a man carried in a long, preten-

tious-looking box. It was addressed to Miss Caroline Ravenel.

Judy found a hammer, and Maum Rachel, alert and expectant, pulled away the papers and straw that hid the gift. When she finally uncovered it, she gave a cry of joy.

"Fer de lub of de Lord!" she cried. "Ef hit aint ole 'Mr. Time,' Miss Caroline. Don't he look natural — big as life! Well, well, de good Gord he don't ferget the poor ole Etheopes after all ——"

"But it's mine, Maum Rachel ——"

"Don't make no difference who he b'long to. He's gwine to hang in my kitchen."

She lifted the old clock tenderly and laid her face against the cold, scarred one.

"Le's get him up, Marsa," she said tremulously. "I can't wait fer to hear him tick. I knows he's got a lot a tales to tell me — 'bout ole Virginny. I spec he's brung a message from Rufus, and Marthy, and my boy Dorwin. I specs he got some'pin to say 'bout little Massa Willie and de Jilsens."

She looked at Caroline through a mist of tears.

"Aren't you glad that I wrote for him, Maumy? I told Mr. Lee how we missed him— you and I — and how lonesome he was without a Kirtley to wind him up ——"

Maum Rachel didn't let her finish the sentence. She caught her in her arms and hugged the breath out of her.

But the pleasantest time of the whole day was when Maum Rachel began packing the basket that Caroline and her father were to carry to the Middleton family on the west side. Caroline put on her long gingham apron (since the stay at the Watts farm she kept one handy and never murmured about helping) and wrapped the fresh bread and cake in white wax paper, poured the steaming chicken soup in glass jars and screwed on the lids, decorated Maumy Rachel's famous mince pie (no one in the world could make mince pies like Maumy) with a sprig of red berries, found a place in the basket for the sliced ham, oranges and apples. She brought from the ice-box a pat of golden butter.

"Let's be very careful where we put this, it's so apt to get squashed," she said handling it gently. "It's hard to make."

She laid it in the basket and stretched her arms, remembering the pain of her one churning. She had never looked at butter since that day without wincing.

When she finished with the basket she went up to her own room and stood for a few moments deep in meditation. The basket was a gift from

the family. Her own contribution had not been decided upon.

She brought from the closet her warm blue bathrobe (Leigh had just finished it a few days before, for the old one was getting shabby) and took a pair of knitted slippers from the shoe bag on the closet door.

She stood for some minutes before her bureau. Finally she opened a drawer and took out a small velvet box. In it reposed a gold ring, set with a small cluster of pearls. It had been given to her on her last birthday, but as her mother did not approve of children wearing jewelry to school, it had been put away for proper occasions.

Caroline looked at it long and tenderly. Then she put it away and closed the drawer quickly.

She had wrapped the robe and slippers in a paper when she went back and looked at the ring again. She took it from the box, tried it on her third finger, held the hand off to admire the effect. Then she laid it in the box again. She had tied up the package and started for the door when she went back to the drawer. This time she did not take the ring from the velvet box. She opened the parcel and thrust it inside the robe, hastily tying the package.

"I'm only just *lending* it," she said, as she sped to the barn and tucked the parcel under

the flap of the carriage seat. "Some day when she's well, I'll ask her for it. She wouldn't keep it if she knew how much I love it. I'm just going to let her wear it while she's getting well. It will be so nice to look at."

The tent on the hill was not nearly so doleful looking this time; smoke curled from the short tin pipe in the rear, and the snow had vanished from the yard, so magical is Colorado's sunshine.

Once more Caroline ventured to the back window. The child lay white and exhausted on the pallet, her long, neatly brushed curls spread on the pillow. The mother's face was all aglow.

"She's better, isn't she, Major?" Caroline said, when her father came back to the phaeton.

"Yes, she is going to live," he answered softly. "She passed the crisis last night."

"I — I left a little package for her at the back door. Do you suppose they will find it?" she asked, after a moment's pause. "I shouldn't like it to get lost — or stolen — for it was something nice."

The Major assured her of its safety, but being very much occupied with his own thoughts, failed to inquire what the package held or if her mother had been consulted in regard to it.

That night, when Caroline was helping Maum

Rachel make sandwiches to serve with hot chocolate before the drawing-room fire (that was always a part of the Christmas festivities), she said softly:

"Did 'Mr. Time' really bring you a message, Maumy?"

"*Um*-hugh," Maum Rachel said, tasting the salad dressing. "He sure did." She glanced at the old clock, ticking above the kitchen sink. "He told me a heap of things."

"What, Maumy?"

"Oh, 'bout Rufus' rheumatiz, an' Marthy's neuralgia, an' a fine new pickaninny they got down to Dorwin's ——"

"But you knew all that before."

"Not the p'tic'lars, honey. I jes' knew fac's. They's a heap a difference."

"Maumy ——"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose he's got any word for me?"

"I specs so, lammie."

"Well — why doesn't he tell me?"

"He done have to be in de mood, Missy. I think ef you come in here long 'bout bedtime and set down in my ole chair — when de house is real still — you'll hear all you wants to know — and see things, too — that is, ef you lay yer head back and shet yer eyes ——"

"Do I have to come alone, Maumy?"

"I'll be somewhere 'round."

It was after the rest of the family were all in bed that Caroline crept down the long winding stair and found her way in the moonlight to the kitchen. The room was warm and cosy, still spicy with Christmas goodies.

She drew the chair in front of the clock and lay back against the turkey-red cushion.

"Mr. Time" paid no attention except to say, "tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock."

But by and by the tick-tock changed to words. Caroline was so sleepy she could scarcely credit them at first, but gradually she got their meaning — oh, so slowly, for her ears were dull, her eyelids heavy.

And then the most marvelous thing happened. She was at home again — out in the back yard that ran to the low green hills. Willie was there, and Mamie Jilsen and Nora McGee; they were romping — hopping over the woodpile — chasing the chickens and the old turkey gobbler — playing at hide and seek.

And just as she was starting a race with Willie, such a race, for Nora was clapping her hands and betting on her; Nora always bet on Caroline — and won — somebody lifted her and carried her away so far that Willie reached the goal while she was struggling, and the ——

Then she felt herself sinking — down — down

— down — into the softest, warmest nest, and a coverlet was tucked around her snugly, and some one whispered:

"Gord bless her li'l', innercent heart — Maumy's li'l' gal —

"She's gwine fer to rest
Fer de win' is in de west
In de west, in the west
Umn, umn, umn."

And she fell asleep, hoping she might dream what the old clock forgot to finish.

CHAPTER IX

New Friends

"IF Mr. Thoreau had lived in Colorado he would never have made that little *bon mot* about Spring," Mayre sighed one windy March morning.

"What was it he said?" Alison asked. They were in the breakfast room looking out on the belated garden.

"Oh, you know. Mother read it the other night. 'March fans it, April christens it, and May puts on its jacket and trousers!' But not here. March blows it away."

"I never saw such wind in my life," Alison complained. "No wonder Maumy hates it. She declares that some day it will pick her up bodily and carry her off."

"Well, if she lands in Virginia, she won't mind."

For a moment they stood looking down the avenue.

"And I was to play tennis with Jimmy Ludlow to-day. We had it all arranged. Oh dear!"

"And I wanted to get the sweet peas planted.

See that wind! It's blowing the soil off the top of my zinnia beds. No one could have a garden here. Look at that poor peach tree. My heart aches for it. Every time it sprouts a leaf, zip comes the frost and nips it. I'd give up trying."

"Father says you can get a good lesson in patience from it. 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try ——' " Mayre finished with a laugh.

"And die in the attempt."

"Anyway, you would have tried. You would have — have defied the frost — and the wind — and ——"

"Fate!" finished Alison. "Peach trees were never meant for Colorado,— this part of it, anyway. It can't be done. Not any more than — than Hopie can learn music."

The steady beat of a five-finger exercise came from the region of the drawing-room; a demonstration of Mrs. Ravenel's faith in providence. She intended to have one musician out of her five possibilities. She had begun with Leigh, descending the line without result.

"From whom would we get talent, Mother dear?" Leigh once asked. "You are not musical, neither is Father ——"

"Your Great-aunt Caroline was exceptionally gifted," Mrs. Ravenel answered, with a sigh. "I remember so well how she used to play for

us, although I was little more than a baby when she married and went away — she was my father's youngest sister ——"

"You couldn't expect her to do more than leave us her money, dearest," Alison had interrupted. "I should prefer her diamonds to talent — and a rope of pearls!"

The wind continued to screech and roar up the street, and Alison turned with a frown.

"I reckon I might as well go and dip my white blouse," she remarked, as she turned from the window. The next time you see it, it will have colored with shame — to a blush rose!"

In a family of five, clothes became a problem. Alison was resourceful.

Mayre watched her as she turned into the hall and ran lightly up the stairs. One liked to watch Alison. She was so handsome, her movements so graceful.

She was taller than her sisters, though not too tall: the Kirtley plumpness (which in later years usually became a source of worry) took from her height. In looking at her, one had the impression of a straight, wholesome young creature, alive with vitality. Her features were regular, her skin fair, an olive tinge underlying it, her eyes large and dark. Like all the Kirtleys, she had a wealth of hair, soft and brown as a thrush's wing. It had a habit of straying about

her temples in tiny ringlets and like tendrils curled at her neck, either side of her flat, wide braid. Alison was always threatening to put her hair up, but so far Leigh and her mother had dissuaded her.

Mayre was altogether different. She lacked Alison's beauty, but there was a distinction about her quite as arrestive. She was neither dark nor fair. Her hair was brown, sunnier than her sister's, and her eyes were as blue as violets. She had a habit of keeping them half-closed, as if to shut in visions, but when she opened them, they were surprisingly large, their expression wistful.

Mayre was petite and dainty. She cared very little about clothes, so long as they were suitable and artistic. She had very definite ideas about the making of them though, and often designed frocks for her sisters.

There were those who declared that Caroline gave promise of "looks" when she had outgrown the "gangling" age and put on flesh. At eleven — or near there — she ran to legs and arms. Her face was small and piquant; her mouth wide and shapely; her nose had an inclination to turn away from the arched red lip beneath, an uppish tendency which nature had thwarted in the nick of time, for a degree's curve more would have made its irresistible sauciness commonplace.

But her eyes redeemed whatever her face lacked in beauty: expressive eyes, one minute dancing with happiness, the next clouded with pain. Sometimes they were calm and placid, again stirred with passion. It was then that they lost their sunny glow, and the splashes grew to velvet blackness.

The wind died about noon. At two Alison came down the stairs looking like a rose in the disguised blouse and white wool skirt. Under her arm she held a tennis racket.

"Will you be at home for tea?" her mother asked, as she passed her in the hall. Afternoon tea was a regular institution in the Ravenel household; they were quite English in the habit.

"Perhaps," Alison called back. "Ask Maumy to make muffins. Jimmy loves them."

By four the veranda had filled with chance guests, for people were beginning to enjoy the hospitality of the Southern family and spoke often of the delightful atmosphere in the transformed "Lee" house.

Mrs. Ludlow brought her work, towels which she was endlessly embroidering, and Mrs. Ravenel had some fine sewing; she loved to whip the lace on the girls' dainty lingerie. Doctor Ravenel sat near — he was seldom busy after four, reserving that hour for calls, when necessary — his warm plaid steamer rug drawn over

his knees. March is often sunny at the foot of the Rockies, but not always warm.

A little farther along on the veranda, Leigh sat with Blair Newland, Mrs. Ludlow's nephew, a tall, delicate young man of twenty, who seemed very much interested in Leigh's handiwork — or her hands — for he bent toward her. He had a fine, high-bred face. His home was in New York, but a sensitive throat had driven him from college to Colorado.

Across from Mrs. Ravenel sat Mrs. Matthews, a slight, nervous-looking woman, who had spent her life in Colorado and resented the slightest criticism of its climate.

If one complained, Mrs. Matthews invariably said, "but you mustn't judge us by this" — "this" meaning wind or snow or sleet — "because it is most unusual. I don't know when I have seen a windy March before. Last year was perfect. I remember ——" and so on.

Mrs. Matthews had a son, Smedley, a lean, lank, obtrusive youth, generally disliked by the young people in the neighborhood and at high school. He was one of those persons, to be found in every circle, who had a very high opinion of his own ability and especially of his humor, which was often a bore. "Punny Matthews", the boys called him.

He was not present this afternoon, but his

mother kept him in mind by constant references.

"If you will excuse me, I will see about tea," Mayre said, when she had tired of the chatter. "Maumy seems to be late."

As she spoke, Caroline came up the veranda steps with Kathleen Briggs, and Maumy appeared at the French window with the service.

It was always a pretty sight to see the daughters of the house rallying to their mother's assistance. Caroline immediately took around the tea napkins, and Mayre stood at Mrs. Ravenel's right hand, waiting to serve the tea in the pink luster cups. No one was ever allowed to touch those cups but Maum Rachel, and she would have mourned in sackcloth and ashes if one had been chipped or broken

"Sugar, Mrs. Ludlow?" Mayre asked, as she deposited a plate.

Mrs. Ludlow looked up, smiling.

"Say it again, Mayre," she begged.

"Say — sugar?"

"Please."

"Sugar, Mrs. Ludlow?"

Mrs. Ludlow's laugh rippled away to where the Doctor sat smiling.

"Oh, these adorable children of yours!" she called. "Their accent is the most delicious thing. Sugah! I do hope it won't vanish in a Western burr. Mayre, if you lose your accent,

I shan't give you that coming-out party I promised you the other day. Remember!"

"Smedley's going to have a party soon," Mrs. Matthews began, but her sentence was lost in the coming of Alison and Jimmy.

All eyes turned to watch them: a charming pair, Jimmy handsome in his tennis flannels.

Alison's face was flushed. She threw her racket to Caroline with a, "Carry it inside, will you, honey; I am so tired. Such a game! I trounced Jimmy soundly!"

Caroline moved toward the door slowly. She could not take her eyes from her sister.

"Oh, Alison," she said, "you look so pretty with your face all pink. It's your blouse, isn't it? It's the same color." Then turning to the guests proudly. "She dyed it this morning. It used to be white. You didn't think at first you could do anything with it——"

A warning cough from her mother stopped the information, but it came too late. A laugh went around the veranda.

Caroline stood confused and ill at ease.

"Shouldn't I have told it?" she asked frankly, looking from her father to her mother.

"Of course you should, you bewitching youngster!" Mrs. Ludlow cried, pulling Caroline nearer. "Why not? It's the very thing I am going to do to one of Jim's silk shirts — only

I'm afraid he won't stand for a blush rose ——"

"Go as far as you like!" came the laughing tones of her son.

Caroline wandered over to her father and sat on the arm of his chair. Maum Rachel, passing the hot muffins, glared at her. If looks had the power to kill, Caroline would have fallen at her feet. Maumy was furious. Her "fam'bly's" poverty had been exposed — and to rich "Yankees," at that!

Doctor Ravenel patted the arm flung around his neck:

"'A wise old owl sat on an oak,'" he quoted.

"I know, Major. 'The more he saw the less he spoke.'"

"Exactly, honey." And then, "Want to go with me to make a call? I am going on the west side."

The west side meant the Middleton family.

"May I? I would love it — if Kathleen doesn't mind."

Kathleen shook her blond head. "I had to go, anyway," she said obligingly.

Eunice Middleton was convalescing slowly, but she was able to sit up for a few hours each day. Her mother had her before the little tin stove, which was warm and pleasant to-day.

Caroline had visited her once before, while she was still in bed. To-day she looked like a

frail flower wabbling on its stem, Caroline thought, noting the drooping head.

"You were so kind to give me this robe," she said weakly. "So very kind — and the ring. I just love it. I am never going to take it off my finger as long as I live."

Caroline swallowed hard, but she managed to smile.

"I think it's pretty," she said; "it was given to me on my birthday. I — I love it, too."

"Perhaps the little girl only meant to lend it to you, dear," the mother suggested.

Eunice looked up quickly, and her blue eyes clouded.

"Did you?" she asked.

Doctor Ravenel was watching his daughter's face closely.

"I — I — do you love it so awfully much?" she stammered.

"It's the only pretty I ever had in my life," the child answered, and her lip quivered.

"Then keep it," Caroline said bravely, her eyes sweeping the barren tent. "I am glad you have it — and the robe, too."

That night, before Caroline slept, she had two duties to perform. The first was an apology to her sister.

Mayre and Alison were preparing for bed, laughing and talking as they brushed and

combed their long, thick hair. The room with its pink shaded light was softly alluring. Caroline dropped down in a chair and listened for a moment to Alison's patter. It was about Jimmy Ludlow and consequently interesting.

At the first break in the story, she began:

"I am sorry about what I said this afternoon, Alison. I didn't think ——"

"You never do," Mayre interrupted, but Alison, who was quick to wrath and quickly over it, said:

"Oh, never mind. Have some candy on Jimmy." She held out a large box. Caroline took a handful.

"My, he must like you!" she said, looking at Alison's flushing face.

"I — I rather think so too, honey," Alison admitted. "Run along now. I am going to put out the light."

Her mother, as usual, was sitting before a grate fire with a book in her hand. Caroline sat on the side of her chair and flung an arm around her.

"Mother," she said softly. "Are you going to care — I gave my pearl ring to that little sick girl on the west side — she was so ill — so terribly ill that first time Major and I went to see her. And the tent was so cold — Oh, it made me sick." She shivered at the memory. "I thought

I was only lending it at first, but to-day — to-day she had it on — she loved it so — she called it a 'pretty' — said it was the first one she had ever had — and I couldn't take it away from her, Mother. I am sure you couldn't have, either. Please don't scold me."

Instead of scolding, Mrs. Ravenel drew the child into her arms.

"Darling," she murmured, "it was a beautiful thing to do. Father has told me how desperately poor they are. If the ring gives her any happiness, she must have it, of course. There will be more for you some day; only I trust that you would not give away heirlooms."

"When Great-aunt passes on ——"

Mrs. Ravenel smiled.

"Or some of yours. Of course, I don't want you to die — *mercy no* — but I'd like the cluster diamond and the one enameled in black — it makes your hand look so white and ——"

The clock in the hall below was striking ten. Mrs. Ravenel kissed Caroline and smiled as she gave her a gentle push.

"It is an hour past your bedtime," she admonished. "Good night."

"Good night. Oh, but you are dear, Mother. And so pretty. Sweet dreams."

It was the old, loving adoration that prevailed in the household.

CHAPTER X

Alison Entertains

BY a strange coincidence Caroline's birthday and Alison's fell on the same day, April fourteenth. Always, since they were small children, they had celebrated the day together. Maumy Rachel never failed to provide two cakes bright with candles, one of which was put before Alison at table, the other in front of her small sister.

But the spring in which Alison reached sixteen and Caroline eleven, there was an upheaval in regard to the old regime.

"It is perfectly ridiculous for us to celebrate together any longer," Alison rebelled. "Imagine Caroline at my party with high-school girls and boys! Who would dance with her?"

"You're afraid they all would," Caroline retorted. "Jimmy Ludlow asked me to save two for him, and I could have lots with Smedley Matthews if I wanted them."

"Well, you aren't coming. I won't have the party if you do, that's all. You can have some

of your own friends in, the day before. I am perfectly willing to help entertain them ——"

"Thank you, you needn't bother. I won't have a party on a day that doesn't belong to me. The fourteenth of April is as much mine as it is yours. And I am coming to the party! I like to dance with nice boys as well as you do."

The days sped on. The first week of April had passed when Fate took a hand in the plans.

Down in front of the old stone high school a flagpole was being raised. Children from the junior grades hovered around it at recess and after school. When it was finished and equipped, there began an epidemic of climbing. Nimble-footed urchins crawled up and slid down daily, and once or twice, when the boys had gone home, girls tried the feat.

Kathleen Briggs, coming out of the building on a chilly April morning, sauntered by the pole to watch Jack Wesley, a dare-devil bully, take his usual spin to the top.

Kathleen was standing a little apart from the crowd, her blue eyes lifted in admiration, when suddenly she felt a pull at her long flaxen braids, and the next minute Bennie Butler, the incorrigible joker of her grade, grabbed her precious new spring sailor and ran shouting to Jack.

"Bet you can't take this up with you."

"Bet I can," Jack answered, slipping back to reach for it.

Kathleen was furious. She had been warned about wearing the hat to school, and she was very susceptible to cold, which frequently resulted in tonsilitis.

"Bennie Butler, you bring my hat back to me this minute!" she called, stamping her small foot determinedly. "That's a brand-new hat ——"

"It won't be when Jack gets through with it: he's going to put it on top of the pole. He'll have to punch a hole through it. You won't have any more hat than a rabbit when he gets through with it."

Caroline, coming out of the building just then, sensed the difficulty. She gave Bennie a look that cut.

"My, but it must have taken a brave heart to have thought of such a dark deed in so short a time," she said witheringly. "Don't mind, Kathleen. Just speak to Bennie's mother about it. Let her pay for it. How much did you say it cost? Six dollars?"

Bennie looked alarmed. Several broken windows had already reduced his allowance.

"Leave'r halfway," he shouted to Jack, not wishing to capitulate altogether, and Jack, none

too sure of his hold, hung it on a convenient spike a third of the way up.

"Wait until they go away," Caroline said, nodding toward the boys, "and I will get it for you. I can climb as well as they can." She measured the height with her eye. "Our old apple tree at home was as high as that, and I used to nearly live in it."

They loitered up the street, turning back when the coast was clear.

She had made the first fifteen feet in safety, when Kathleen called that the boys were coming back. Caroline fumbled, lost her hold, then down she came with a thud, her slight little body landing on the dusty playground.

"Now you have done it!" Kathleen screamed to the frightened boys. "You've killed her. Look! She's knocked senseless!"

True, she was dazed, and there was a tingling sensation in her nose that hurt. It bled and ached and was altogether uncomfortable.

"You go get something to carry her home in," Kathleen ordered. "She can't walk. I wouldn't be surprised if she hadn't broken both her legs."

With admirable composure (and secret delight) Caroline let the crowd dump her into an improvised stretcher and the procession moved slowly up the avenue.

Leigh saw it coming and hastened to close her

mother's door. Fortunately Doctor Ravenel was at home. He was some time going over the little form stretched on the pine table, and his face was grave.

"It is nothing worse than a broken nose," he said finally, to Leigh's intense relief.

In half an hour Caroline was sitting up with a bumpy looking bandage over the middle of her face and a worried look in her darkening eyes. She had made no complaint, asked but one question:

"Will it have a hump on it, Major — my nose? Seems as if I couldn't stand it — not on a near pug. It would be awful."

Her father bent and kissed the brown forehead peeping above the bandage. "It is going to be all right," he said.

She was halfway up the stairs when she called back:

"Major, I most forgot. Send the bill to Mrs. Butler on Willammette Street and make it big. I'm going to teach Bennie a lesson. I don't see why, just 'cause you're a surgeon, you shouldn't have your pay for fixing me up. And you might add six dollars for Kathleen's hat. It's up on the pole yet, and the wind's rising."

The Major smiled as he turned into his office, but he made no promises.

Up in the attic sewing room the week before

the party, machines buzzed and whirred all day long. Miss Wille Macon, the Virginia seamstress, had been replaced by Miss Ella Younge, quite as efficient, and a peach-blow organdy was in the process of construction for Alison. Dozens of tiny ruffles rippled around the skirt, and the bodice was cut in a round neck, a great concession on the part of Alison's mother, for in "her day," so she said, girls never had party dresses until they "came out."

"You'll be perfectly dar-ling in it," Caroline said, watching a morning fitting; she had been out of school for several days.

Alison's heart smote her as she turned to look at the little form sitting cross-legged in a wide easy chair. Nothing had been said about Caroline's attending the party since the accident: the ugly patch still worn across her somber little face precluded the possibility; still, it was rather mean to deny her the fun of looking on, when she was so uncomfortable and shut in.

"Major says my patch will be so much smaller that it won't look bad for a party at all," she said, letting her eyes follow the billowy ruffles. "Will my white dress be done, Miss Younge?"

"I hope so, dear."

"I want ruffles, too, just like Alison's. I think I will have it made the same way."

Alison sighed impatiently.

"It would not be at all becoming to you, Caroline, you are too small; besides, I told you the other day that you were not coming to the party."

Alison turned in time to catch one of Caroline's "faces."

"There," she said, "that proves what a baby you are. Girls who are old enough to go to dances don't make faces."

"I wasn't, I was just —" she was going to say, "turning up my nose" but remembering that was impossible, left the sentence suspended.

The day of the party arrived. Leigh rose early to help Judy put the house in order. Maumy Rachel, busy and important with pound cake and hermits, shuffled through the kitchen and pantries, scolding and carefully locking doors.

"I reckon w'all 'll show them Yankees how to serve 'freshments," she said, with a nod of her kinky head. "They'll all be wantin' my raspberry shrub and cucumber punch."

"Make everything just as nice as you can, Maumy dear," Alison coaxed, thrusting an anxious head into the fragrant kitchen. "We're not going to have much, you know, so it must all be good."

Mayre was also busy dusting the rooms, giving an extra brush to Aunt Caroline's smiling

face and Grandfather Kirtley's, seeing that the furniture was moved for dancing.

Caroline watched the preparations with a sinking heart. There had been an ultimatum in regard to the party; the Major had sided with Alison. The Major, who was always on her side! The disappointment was too bitter even to think about.

As Alison had said, everything was to be extremely simple, not alone because good taste demanded it, but because of the limitations of the Ravenel purse.

Doctor Ravenel's practise was increasing, but money was always scarce; those who paid for his services were slow, and many offered provisions in return for his skill in setting bones and healing chicken pox and fevers.

At the early five o'clock dinner, Caroline's cake was put before her with its array of sparkling candles, but she listlessly blew them out and left the table as soon as she had cut it.

"Oh, Mother, she makes me feel so horribly selfish," Alison said, between a tear and a laugh. "But she would be out of place at the party with young people who are almost grown — and that patch in the bargain!"

Mrs. Ravenel's silence did not help Alison's feelings.

"She — she's just spoiling everything! I can't

eat a bite myself! I hate seeing her so unhappy."

"She'll get over it," Mayre comforted. "I think you are perfectly justified." Mayre was sharing the delights of the evening.

By seven o'clock there was a hasty pattering of feet on the second floor. Alison ran back and forth, first to Leigh's room, and then to her mother's. The new frock needed a pin here, a stitch there, a gentle pushing down of the voluminous ruffles.

"Sure it doesn't make me look stout?" Caroline heard her say to Mayre, and Mayre's answer:

"You are simply stunning, I reckon he ——"

The rest was lost with the closing of Alison's bedroom door.

That young lady came into Caroline's room a few minutes later, with a "Want to see me, honey? The dress seems to be a success!"

Caroline turned her head and directed her glance to the house across the way.

Alison sent a kiss fluttering toward the window and closed the door softly. She was a little hurt, but she had no intention of letting Caroline's disappointment spoil her evening.

The music had begun downstairs when Caroline opened her closet door and took out the white dress that Miss Younge had labored to

finish for her birthday. She threw it over the back of a chair and drew her best lingerie and stockings from the wide bottom drawer. Fortunately, Mrs. Ravenel had thought best to put Hope in the guest room on the third floor for the night, lest her rest should be disturbed.

It took some time to dress. The white patch across her nose (decreasing daily and little more than a strip of adhesive plaster now) gave her some concern. It destroyed the effect she wanted to produce. However, she made herself as presentable as her affliction would permit and wandered out in the hall to look down on the festivities below.

Around the wide upper hall a white enameled fence, topped with mahogany, protected a central well. Over this one could look down into the hall below; in fact, the view was sweeping.

Back of the rail, leading to the chambers, a wide strip of hall gave the effect of a mezzanine. Now and then Caroline's eyes swept it, measuring its length and breadth.

For some minutes she watched the guests below. Her mother was very handsome in her black velvet gown (remnant of better days) and Mayre sweet in a blue organdy that matched her eyes.

Leigh was looking well too, in white. She kept one of her mother's pretty fans waving

languorously. Now and then Caroline imitated the graceful gesture, lifting her eyes to an imaginary partner.

It was just before the third dance that she spied Jimmy Ludlow standing beneath her. He seemed very tall and grown-up in his evening clothes, and for a moment Caroline hesitated to attract his attention.

But she leaned over the rail and let loose her little white handkerchief. It fell, wandering and wabbling, to Jimmy's feet. He picked it up, and not having seen it drop, presented it to Alison.

When the next dance was over she dropped another, — her very best. This was carried around the room until Muriel Roach (Caroline never liked her afterward) gracefully accepted it as her own and tucked it into her taffeta gown.

The third was more successful. It fell on Jimmy's head. He looked up. Caroline crooked a finger. Jimmy took the stairs two at a time.

"Hello, youngster," he said amiably, "What's the matter with you? Weren't you invited to the party?"

Caroline shook her head and her creamy lids fluttered over her hazel eyes. Jimmy suspicioned tears.

"Jove, that's a shame," he said. Then, "I'll

tell you what — let's have a two-step around the hall, here."

It was even easier than Caroline had hoped.

"Couldn't you stay for the next one?" she begged, when they had finished. "It — it's terribly lonesome up here all alone — and you see — my nose ——"

Jimmy remained.

"Send somebody else up, will you?" she asked, when he said he must go. "And Jimmy — I'd love it if you'd come again — just once more. The — seventh — maybe — a waltz — I could pretty nearly die dancing with you. You are so easy — and — and I'll tell you what Alison said, if you will — a T. L."

Jimmy looked hopeful, but uneasy.

"Wouldn't Smedley do?"

All of Caroline's nose that could wiggle went skyward.

"Or — Scotty Randolf ——"

"He's better ——"

"Maybe Ned Adams ——"

"I like him — so does Mayre." The information slipped out, she had not really meant to give it.

She came closer and put her little brown hand on his coat. "I tell you what to do — you send them all — one at a time — and I'll give you the T. L. now. Alison says that you ——"

She hesitated and took a short, swift breath.

"She says she thinks you have the sweetest mother — (the "mothah" was deliciously drawled) and the loveliest dogs — and — and — you will send them, won't you?"

"Sure I'll send them — in droves ——"

"And she thinks that you ——"

Caroline hesitated and Jimmy, laughing, slipped a hand over her red lips.

"Let me guess," he suggested; "that would be fairer." But he left without another word.

Ned Adams came first. There was a glorious romp around the hall. Scotty came next: he wasn't such a good dancer, but he was lots of fun. Smedley also wandered up and worked off a few puns on noses. And then Jimmy came again, with an ice and a piece of Maumy Rachel's pound cake, promising another dance, but it was Maumy herself who put a stop to it.

"What y'all think you doin' up here?" she said, eyeing the culprit, arms akimbo. (Jimmy had made his escape.) "What y'all mean, takin' away yer sister's beaux and holdin high jinks all by y'self? What you think Miss Leigh's gwine say 'bout hit when I tell her?"

"It's my birthday, just as much as it is Alison's.

"You done had your cake at dinner."

Caroline's great yellow eyes gleamed disgust.

"Cake!" she said. "Cake! What's your old cake to a dance with Jimmy Ludlow, I'd like to know. And Alison had better look out. He's very much enamored of me. He said so. And we made some engagements together — to go to the circus when it comes this summer and ——"

With a snort Maumy Rachel went back downstairs.

That night, just before she closed her tired eyes, Allison said to Mayre:

"I am glad that I am five years older than Caroline and won't be on the scene when she comes along. Lots of chance I'd have. Why, to-night, Jimmy Ludlow raved about her — thinks she's the most fascinating child he ever saw. It's just as well she couldn't come to the party."

And Mayre, having witnessed a part of the entertainment on the second floor, kept a discreet silence.

CHAPTER XI

In The Tower

IT was Jimmy's fault, of course, though he was quite innocent of the effect he had produced upon Caroline's highly imaginative mind.

Two days after the dancing party, she asked a favor of her father.

"May I have the tower room for a den, Major? I want to do some literary work, and I have to have a place that's quiet."

"More dramas?" the doctor inquired.

"Maybe — yes."

"I have no objection, so long as you let me share the sunset and have a look at the Peak through the telescope once in awhile." The telescope, resurrected from the attic, was often in demand.

"Surely. I'll have a key made for you."

"You don't want to lock the room?"

"Of course. Don't you lock your office? People would be bumping in all the time."

The doctor could scarcely consent to that.

"Could I have the desk that Mr. Lee left in

the attic, then — the one with the roll top? I could lock that."

The Major had no objection.

It took some hours to get the little room in order. Along with the desk came a bookcase and a worn, but comfortable chair; a couple of uniformed soldiers in round, hard-wood frames, ancestors that had been relegated to the room under the roof.

It was very cosy when Caroline finished. "The child has quite an idea of furnishing," Mrs. Ravenel said. Mayre had made several excellent suggestions.

Every moment that Caroline could spare from school and play was spent in the den. It was a pleasant retreat. Across the street, which curved toward the mountains, stood the Ludlow dwelling, large and handsome. It twisted a bit with the street, as if to court favor with the old monster in the west, its shingled sides and pointed gables proclaiming its autocracy.

But, handsome as it was, it could not compete with the house beyond, toward the mountains; the large English mansion that had been closed for two years, so Kathleen said, weaving a pretty romance about it.

A young nobleman had come from England with his bride, bringing servants and furniture, his carriages, horses and hounds, for he knew

that Colorado must always be his home because of the frailty of his young bride. They had taken a smaller house in the neighborhood while the larger one was being completed, watching it grow with pride and pleasure, planning the great airy chambers, the wide verandas, the splendid gardens. There had been but one year of happiness. Then the wife died, and turning the house over to a caretaker, the young husband returned to England.

Caroline always sighed when she looked at the place. Over it hung a veil of mystery. Sometimes she and Kathleen walked through the grounds, gazing romantically at the south chamber with its sunny, glassed-in gallery where the young wife had died.

Kathleen's descriptions of her were alluring: she dwelt long and tenderly on her beauty, her fluffy negligees, her marvelous shawls, the retinue of servants.

"And you used really to see them walking together," Caroline would ask with awed interest, "out in the gardens there?"

"Often," Kathleen answered, "and always she had her arm through his, and sometimes she leaned on him a little — like as if she was awful tired." (The Briggs fortune had bought everything but good English.)

"Was he tall and handsome?"

Kathleen was sorry to admit that he was not. He was "just medium" but distinguished, and with an accent — oh, an accent that shouted "London." People said they were very snobbish, though once when Kathleen had returned a lost puppy to him he had smiled, thanking her warmly.

Now, however, "The Lodge," as it was familiarly known to the townsfolk, was but a memory, — one of those bitter tragedies that so often stalk through Colorado villages.

Perhaps it was not all Jimmie's fault. Perhaps Kathleen's tales of the Lodge and a goodly dose of light fiction, borrowed from the Briggs library and secreted in the den, helped, but Caroline's wayward fancy soared. The old desk became a receptacle for reams of letters written in her round, childish hand. They were tucked in every pigeonhole: some were tied in packets, with lingerie ribbons in elaborate bows.

Alison, going to the den one day for a lost book, found the desk open, a very unusual occurrence. A half-finished epistle partially covered with a blotting pad caught her eye. Mayre would never have thought of perusing a correspondence not her own, but Alison was different. With her, curiosity often got the better of principle. She removed the blotter and looked at the heading.

The first words brought a gasp of astonishment.

"My dearest:" the letter began. "Your beautiful violits and orchads came this morning and I cannot tell you how the messengers of your heart cheered my spirits and did me good. How kind you are to think of me and to send orchads that are so expensive specially at this time of the year, and in Colorado where they don't do well. I expect my dear one that I must chide you for this extravegince, for we must now be saving our principle for our marrage

"Every since the night that we danced together and you told me of your enamerement I have loved you with a passion that is heavenly and it gives me great contentment to know that my feelings are returned.

"Am glad to know that you are thinking of speaking with the Major about us soon, but it causes me a good deal of excitement as he is likely to think me to young to accept of an engagement. I think you would perhaps better come over some time when he is about to make a call and drive Selah for him. He always gets interested in the seenry and you could drive fast and get it done with quickly. It would be better to ask him than Mother as she would want to know who your grand father was I am sure and if he was fit to woo a Kirtley ——"

The letter was so delectable that Alison reached for another. It was brief, beginning:

"The news that your father is coming to look me over fills me with fright. Suppose dear one he should not like me. Have you told him I wonder about the spots in my eyes and my nose a little uppish. It is always best to be honest, especially with your relatives, they always find out everything anyway. Has he a faveret color? If he has and you would let me know I would be pleased to put it on and do everything in my power to win his delight. Thank you again for the beautiful roses which I have pressed in our Kirtley bible that no one ever looks at except to see how old we are. There they are safe from mortal eyes as Mother hates to see it written down that I was born in Vermont which is the same as the North. Virginia is really my home, Warrensburg which my grandfather and General Warren started some years ago.

"Your adoring fiancie

"Caroline Ravenel

"P. S. Do you speak French?"

The fourth letter was so absorbing that Alison found it difficult to hide when she heard footsteps on the stair. She turned guiltily.

Caroline took in the situation at a glance. A dark flame stained her face, in her eyes a storm gathered.

Alison's giggle turned to confusion.

"It was so funny, honey; I saw the beginning and ——"

"Read it all! My private correspondence. That's your idea of honor!"

She snatched the letter from its hiding place and tore it into shreds. Then, with the air of a tragedy queen, pointed a slim forefinger toward the door.

"Leave my room this minute. This minute! I won't have you here. You've done a horrid, unladylike, sneaky thing. And I — I hate you for it!"

"Oh, darling ——"

"You needn't darling me. It won't go. And if you mention this to anybody ——"

"I hadn't thought of mentioning it ——"

"I don't know what you'd do. But let me catch you. I'll get even." The specks in the flashing eyes had spread; they were black and threatening. "I promised a friend of yours a trade last, and I'll make it a dandy."

"Just you dare. Let me catch you!"

"Oh, no. I won't. I'm not so silly as to let people catch me. Trouble with you is you are too pretty to be smart. Maumy Rachel says the good Lord always knows when He's done enough for people — looks and brains are natural enemies."

"It is time you were rising above Maumy Rachel's silly clatter."

"Silly! She's got more sense in a minute than you have in your life. She wouldn't read other people's letters."

The thought of poor old Maumy, who didn't know A from B, made Alison smile.

"Oh, I know well enough she can't read — but — but ——"

The sentence stopped in a sob; Caroline flung herself down on the window seat and burst into tears.

Alison stooped, trying to caress the thick ropes of hair. She was pushed off rudely.

"Go on out of my room and never come in it again!"

Alison went.

The storm spent itself after a while, and Caroline sat up. For a time she was lost in thought. She dreaded going downstairs to tea, for of course Alison would tell the family, and they would all laugh — laugh!

The thought cut into her heart like a thrust. She loved a joke, even on herself, but ridicule, — that was beyond endurance.

She went into the guest room and bathed her swollen eyes. Then she crept down the back stairs and out into the yard.

Kathleen beckoned her over, but she was in

no mood to visit, so she strolled through the back gate and on toward the hills.

In May, Colorado is in her gentlest mood. The wind becomes a playful zephyr; the air is warm and invigorating. Verandas filled with invalids, drinking in the sunshine; the highway is a vast procession of carriages, flying motors, and horseback enthusiasts.

Caroline wandered up the street, hatless, coatless, letting the breeze fan her hot temples and aching head. She sniffed the air as she had seen her father do, filling her lungs with deep draughts.

Over the fields of grass and stubble the sunshine gleamed, warming the peeping anemones, the blue bells and larkspur. Now and then Caroline stopped to pick a handful, absently, as if her thoughts were miles away.

She took the road that led to the mesa above the village, a broad open space frequented by the rich. She sat down in a patch of struggling grass to watch the endless procession of carriages, brilliant with red and green or orange parasols, held above handsome women and carefree men.

My, but it must be nice to be rich and loll back like that, she thought, as an unusually handsome Victoria passed, — Coloradoans had not yet given up their spanking bays and tandems for motors.

But after a while she turned her eyes from the road and let them wander to the mountains chiseled against the sky. To-day they were warm and friendly: the Peak had slipped back his hood, lost his brooding look; there was a cordial atmosphere about him.

"Maumy would like him to-day," Caroline thought, squinting at his bulging head and wide-flung arms, "if she would only look, but she's so stubborn."

She was so interested in the wavering outline, her busy mind fancying all sorts of romances about the towering pines, the peaks, the animals that crossed those snow-filled chasms that she was startled when a voice called, "Hello, Caroline, what are you doing way out here all by your lonesome?"

Jimmy Ludlow grinned down on her from his spirited horse.

"Just — looking ——"

"The old man's quite human to-day, isn't he? Seems to be looking, too." He waved his riding crop toward the mountains.

"I was just thinking that," Caroline said, with a flashing smile. "I wondered what he thought about everything down here ——"

Jimmy dismounted, and stretching his long limbs beside her, let Minto bite at the sweet grass.

Caroline eyed him from the tail of her hazel eyes.

"You look nice," she said, when she had made a more complete survey. "I like you in riding clothes. They make you look ——" she couldn't think of a word, but in a moment added — "distinguished."

Jimmy doffed his hat, and running his hand through his light, pompadoured hair, smiled.

Caroline took another look, slyly. Her eyes were rewarded. Jimmy in his riding togs was all that she thought — and more. From his father he had taken height, but his mother had given him his clear gray eyes, his fine nose, his pleasant smile and white, even teeth.

Colorado had done the rest: put the snap in his strong, athletic body, whipped his face to a healthy tan.

"Distinguished," he repeated, with his quick, short laugh. "You are looking rather nice yourself to-day, Caroline."

"No, I am not."

"No?"

"I look horrid. I — don't you see my eyes?"

"I thought it was your nose ——"

"Oh, that's well. I mean I — I've been crying. I got mad ——"

"No!"

"Yes, I did."

"Terrible!"

"Do you think it's honorable to go into people's things and look them over — correspondence — that is private?"

Jimmy scratched his head and puckered his mouth, but his answer was guarded.

"I would have to know the particulars," he said. "Want me to be your policeman?"

Caroline's red lips parted in a smile, but they tightened again. A Kirtley adage popped into her mind.

"Thank you, but—but our family always keeps a veil between itself and the world."

Jimmy's laugh started, but the serious face beside him checked it.

"Feeling pretty low, eh?"

"Quite."

He thought for a minute.

"Suppose I go home and get Pinto; it will only take a few minutes, and we'll have a trot over the hill."

"Could you? I haven't been on a horse since I left home."

Jimmy was back in a few minutes.

"I stopped at the house," he said, "and brought your sweater."

He held it open, a tawny, brownish thing that softened her eyes to topaz. Mayre always insisted upon Caroline's wearing brown or yellow.

Jimmy made a cup of his hands and Caroline jumped from them to the horse's back.

"Fine!" he complimented. "You did that like a real circus lady."

"Oh, I often rode Calico standing up — and without a saddle. I once thought of joining a circus, but Major wasn't very well, and Mother thought it would disgrace the Kirtleys ——"

"So you chucked it. Agreeable of you, Caroline."

He turned an admiring glance at the little form in the saddle. He liked the way she sat, as if she were a part of Pinto. When he trotted, she rose in the saddle with an ease that surprised him.

He watched her face, alight with pleasure and excitement. The soft wind blew the hair back from her full forehead, her head inclined forward; a beautiful head, swaying above the slender sun-tanned neck.

"I would like to see that hair wreathed on top," Jimmy thought, following the graceful lines. She's going to be some looker when she grows up.

He let Caroline do the talking, drawing her out now and then with a sly bait (not for nothing was he some day going to be a lawyer), enjoying her comments, her rich Southern accent.

Before they had gone three miles he had been introduced to the old mansion in the South, to

Rufus and his wife Charity Lou, Willie Boland, the Jilsens and McGees; he knew Aunt Caroline, too, and how her fortune was to be distributed, of Mayre's talent for art, which was to make her famous as a landscape gardener.

Of Alison there was never a word. But Caroline was sorely tempted; once the information that Alison was not quite reliable almost escaped her, but the Kirtley "veil that shut out the world" dropped in time. Her lips became a grim line.

"I reckon I've been doing most all the talking," she admitted, when they turned homeward. She was silent for a moment, wondering if she had said more than she should. Maumy Rachel was always cautioning her about "fam'bly secrets."

"I have been very much entertained," Jimmy declared. Jimmy was eighteen and easily amused.

"Tell me something about yourself."

"There is not much to tell, Caroline. My mother has given up her plan of making me President of the United States and has compromised on Princeton; she still has a sneaking hope ——"

"You are going to college?"

"In the fall."

"How wonderful. Will you be gone four years?"

"If they keep me—vacations excepted."

"You will come home for those?"

"You couldn't chain me East in the summer time."

"I know. I love it too." Her hand swept the mountains. "Maumy says they shut you in — those old rocks — but I always feel they are a gateway — to something nicer. Have you been on the other side?"

"Yes."

"What's over there?"

"More mountains."

"Lots more?"

"Heaps!"

She slid from Pinto's back when they reached home and threw the reins to Jimmy.

"Thank you for a wonderful time," she said, "and some day — when you are low yourself, come over ——"

"Thanks a lot."

She stood watching him as he galloped down the block. When he reached his own corner, he turned and waved.

Caroline moved toward the house in a trance.

CHAPTER XII

Caroline Attends a Ball

THE first two years in Colorado brought few changes. The Ravenel family had comfortably established themselves in the community and made several close friends. Caroline's friendships were more or less fleeting, owing to her family's very decided opinions, although she was inclined, once she had given her affection, to stand by it.

This was true in regard to Kathleen. A rather disagreeable affair, or it might have been disagreeable had not Mrs. Ravenel's dignity prevented, arose between the two families, but Caroline declined to give it a moment's consideration.

Mrs. Briggs, a pompous, uncultivated woman, envying the smoothness with which the house next door to her own was operated, offered Judy two dollars a week more than Mrs. Ravenel was paying for her services. Judy asked for an advance in her wages. It was not forthcoming, so she packed her things in high dudgeon and took up her abode next door.

"It's these here Colorado darkies that's makin'

her so biggity," Maum Rachel declared. "Judy'll be beggin' Miss Em'bly to take her back in a month; she cain't live with them no-count white trash — not after her bringin' up!"

But for once Maumy was a poor prophet. Judy remained, growing slacker and more careless every day. Now and then she came over for a half-hour's visit with Maum Rachel, only to be received with chilling politeness.

One evening, having dined at the Briggs house with Evelyn, Kathleen's elder sister, Alison brought home an amusing story.

Mrs. Briggs, an amateur at entertaining, was giving a dinner for her budding daughter, and wishing to impress the guests with her service, suggested to Judy that she "fix up" for the occasion.

Judy, taking advantage of her opportunity, appeared in full evening dress, her bare black shoulders billowing above a plumed red satin bodice.

"I gave her one look, Mother," Alison said, "and the next time she came in she had thrown a light shawl over her shoulders, tying it around her waist securely."

Judy had not been replaced in the household for several reasons, and her work was divided among the family. It became Alison's duty to take care of the upstairs bedrooms; Mayre as-

sisted, while Caroline helped Maumy in the kitchen, ran errands, dusted the drawing-room and sometimes relieved Leigh in the office.

Leigh, now almost twenty, and a great favorite with Mrs. Ravenel's friends, was invited out often, but she seldom found time to accept invitations: the supervision of the household, running on a restricted allowance, the mending, the hundred and one things that claim the attention of a home-maker, devolved upon her. Mrs. Ravenel, as the years went on, became less and less a help, except for counsel, which was always given wisely.

Sometimes, as Alison would scurry through the hall, late for a game or *thé dansant,* she would whisper with a good-bye kiss, "I wish you were going, Leigh dear; it's such fun!" and Leigh would detain her for a moment, smoothing out her blouse or putting an invisible pin in the struggling curls. Sometimes her blue eyes were wistful; always they were proud.

But she had her diversions; afternoons on the sunny veranda with Blair Newland, who brought the latest fiction and poetry, the newest biography to read aloud and discuss; drives with her father, sometimes out in the country when the wind was fresh and invigorating, the mountains blue and rugged.

Friends, dropping in for a cup of tea, served

with Maumy's muffins or hot corn bread, little guessed at the economies that were practised in the household. The simple elegance went on. Leigh's watchful eyes and clever fingers barred suspicion. It was she who made over Alison's dresses for Mayre, Caroline's for little Hope, she who suggested that certain things be dropped from the always lavish table; that desserts be confined to Wednesdays and Sundays, for greater enjoyment.

The younger children had no idea of how scarce money was in the household. Alison knew, and Mayre wondered, but questions were never asked. Sometimes Alison's selfishness would show itself. "I simply must have a new party dress," she would declare, and Leigh would sit up a little later planning, get up a little earlier in the morning to sew. "Alison was so pretty. She did credit to her clothes. Youth was so fleeting." So she argued.

Doctor Ravenel gained slowly but steadily. There were times when overwork put him to bed for an afternoon, days when his footsteps lagged. Then Leigh took the helm and kept back the line of lame, halt and blind that came to his door for relief.

"Kathleen says that Major's practice isn't as fashionable (Kathleen had really said 'swell') as Doctor Arlington's down the street," Caroline

once said to Leigh. "Doctor Arlington doesn't take poor people."

Leigh's pride flamed for an instant. She stooped and kissed Caroline's flushed face.

"Doctor Arlington isn't to be spoken of in the same breath, darling. Doctor Arlington is — is merely a doctor. Father is a humanitarian." The distinction was well made. Doctor Ravenel's skill, plus sympathy and experience, put him outside the rôle of ordinary physician.

Sometimes Caroline took a turn at keeping office. She had a welcome smile for each forlorn, weary individual who passed the portal, a keen interest. And while she was observing, wondering, commenting, she was growing in sympathy and understanding, building the ramparts of character.

At thirteen she had changed but little, except to shoot up like a young sapling and to take on that self-assertive manner that marks adolesence.

"Caroline thinks she knows it all," Mayre commented one day to Leigh.

"So did you at thirteen, dear," Leigh answered patiently.

"But you can't tell her anything ——"

"You can't drive; you must coax her."

"She wears her hair so outrageously—with that awful band across her forehead and those frowzy puffs ——"

"That's her present idea of style. She's experimenting, expressing herself. Didn't you?"

"I believe, not wishing to be conceited, that I always had an idea of what was in taste. It gives me the fidgets to see Caroline's hair and her clothes—the way she wears them," Mayre sighed despairingly.

"Caroline is like a clumsy caterpillar preparing to stretch butterfly wings. Give her time," Leigh begged. "Let her put some of her queer notions into practice; 'she will light after while,' as Maum Rachel says."

A few days after this conversation Caroline gave the entire family a decided shock.

"I see by the paper that the bakers are going to give a dance this evening," she said to Alison who was deep in a novel.

"A dance — the bakers? What of it?"

"I thought maybe I would go; it's public," Caroline answered.

Alison's well-bred laugh for once escaped the confines of the room.

"What's the joke?"

"A bakers' dance! Caroline!"

The novel proved too entertaining for remonstrance. Alison said no more.

That evening (it was September) when the family gathered around the fire, one face was missing. "Where is Caroline?" her mother asked.

"I saw her putting on her best dress and hat as if she were going somewhere," Hope said.

Leigh rose from her chair; Mrs. Ravenel looked startled.

"Surely she would not go out at night without telling us," Mayre ventured.

Alison paid little attention. Suddenly she too rose from her chair.

"Leigh," she said, catching hold of her sister's arm in fright. "You don't suppose — oh, it couldn't be possible ——"

"What?" gasped the family in chorus.

"That she would go to that — that public dance the bakers are giving."

"My dear child, explain what you mean." Mrs. Ravenel cried, her face blanching.

"This morning, when she was reading the paper, she told me that they were giving a dance — the bakers — and that she believed she would go. Of course I thought she was joking."

"She put on her dancing pumps," Hope supplemented.

"Where was this dance to be given?" Doctor Ravenel asked a little anxiously.

"She didn't say."

"At the Coliseum hall. I read the notice," Hope contributed.

Leigh started for the door. Her father overtook her.

"I shall go this time," he said firmly.

He saw Caroline long before she saw him. She was standing back from the crowd, looking on with eyes a little frightened. Now and then a rude couple jostled her, and she shrank back against the wall to let them pass. Once a young man approached her, but she shook her head at his invitation. Another came, a merry-faced lad with a clean countenance. She whirled off with him.

Others came. She picked and chose. Her father, concealed by the crowd, watched in silence. Finally he made his way to where she was resting.

The light went out of her eyes when she recognized him, but his smile was reassuring

"Come, Caroline," he said, and she followed meekly.

Outside in the starlight, he questioned her. Years after, she remembered that leisurely walk up the wide, sandy avenue, her hand in his — the gentle admonition — the patience with which he explained — the startling truths he laid bare.

"But you didn't care just because — because they were *common* people?" she asked wistfully, every atom of her democratic nature rousing to the word.

She never forgot his answer.

"No one is common until he has proved himself

so. You will find common people in stations above you, as well as below."

After that night he seldom worried about her freakish fancies. "Her ideals are her armor," he said to her mother. "Yes, even at thirteen. I watched her choose."

And Mrs. Ravenel murmured.. "Of course, with her Kirtley blood and Ravenel inheritance, one would expect that. Still, one can scarcely be too cautious."

Another event took place during that September, changing the home life considerably.

A few blocks away lived the rector of the church the Ravenel family attended. Barbara, his only daughter, had become Alison's best friend. They had graduated together at the old high-school in June and spent a great deal of time in social activities

Alison came home one afternoon, looking very forlorn.

"The most wonderful thing has happened to Barbara," she remarked to the family. "That wealthy Mr. Donovan who sits just in front of us in church is going to send her abroad to study music. (Barbara was very talented, playing the piano skilfully.) I have just come from there and they are all so excited. Fancy! I wish I had a talent and knew a Mr. Donovan. All the girls are going away for a year, at least, — Mary

Stuart to New York and Edith Worthington to Boston. Haven't you any friends who would adopt me, Mother?"

Mrs. Ravenel thought a moment. The news had touched a vulnerable spot, — her pride. She remembered her own girlhood at a finishing school: Miss Sallie Briarley's at Richmond. Those seminary days were a cherished memory.

"Your father's cousin, Eliza Mott (Eliza had been one of *the* Ravenels in Richmond) has begged me to let her have one of my girls ever since she lost dear Beverly two years ago." Beverly was an only son, and his empty place in the household was still an aching void.

"Oh, Mother!" Alison clapped her hands with delight. "Write to her please. This very night. It is a wonderful opportunity."

"I will talk it over with your father, darling."

Ten days later the following letter stirred the Ravenel family to activity:

"The news that you are willing to lend us your precious child for the winter fills us with joy. We shall take excellent care of her and do all we can for her happiness and welfare. Suggest that you get her off as soon as possible. Briarley Seminary opens the fifteenth. Fearing that at the last moment you may, dear cousin Emily, change your mind, we are sending you her tickets, Pullman, etc."

"Bless the Lord for rich relatives!" Alison cried, dancing around the room in glee. "As Maumy says: 'If y' ain't got a kerriage yourself, hit's mighty fine to have kerriage friends!'"

"We have a carriage," Caroline defended, her pride flaming.

The following week was one never to be forgotten in the household. Leigh and her mother schemed and maneuvered about clothes, for Alison could not go South without suitable and becoming frocks.

Attic trunks and boxes were rifled, old materials ripped and sponged.

"It is almost as good as getting ready for a wedding," Mayre thought, designing the pretty gowns. She was quite as interested as if she herself were to have the wonderful trip.

"It will be your turn next," Alison reminded, kissing her as she sat with her pencils and sketches, "only of course you will go to London or Paris."

"On what, please? It takes money to travel."

"Perhaps Great-aunt will have mounted the golden stairs by ——"

"Alison!"

"I beg your pardon, Mother. I was only joking, of course."

"Great-aunt may have already mounted ——"

"Caroline!"

"Yes, Mother."

"Do not be unseemly, my child. It is a violation of taste to joke about the demise of one's friends."

"But she's only a relation, and we don't even know her, she's just a ——"

"Myth, honey," Alison finished for her.

Up in the attic sewing room, machines burred and whizzed again; rich old silks were combined with soft cashmeres and grenadines, voile toned with gorgeous plaids. From a quaint gray bengaline a stunning evening frock was evolved; touched with a collar of real lace, it looked fit for a princess, Caroline declared.

Every one was interested, every one happy. Sometimes Doctor Ravenel climbed the attic stairs and paused for a moment to look at the pretty things heaped on the sewing table, and Maumy Rachel left her dishes to see how the gowns were progressing.

"Why don't y'all trim th's y'r coat with some 'oyster' plumes," she said, eyeing the ostrich feathers that Mayre had pulled from a chest. "They's wearin' 'em a heap. I saw a cullod woman at the Baptis' church last Sunday plum done up in 'em. Beats all how the folks out here gets the cash to dress."

She brought up three linen handkerchiefs, her own Christmas gifts.

"Them's real linen," she said, wetting her finger and applying it to one. She held it to the light and peered through it. "Y'all can tell by testin' it. You take 'em, Miss Alison. They'll be nice with yer silk dresses for parties."

"Oh, Maumy dear, I can't take your pretty things!"

"Go long, now, you insults me ef you don't. I ain't got nothin' else to give."

Alison reluctantly laid them away in the scented case that Leigh had lost sleep to embroider.

The dresses were finished at last and packed in the big leather trunk in which Emily Ravenel had carried her clothes away to school: a pretty silk for afternoon wear, a blue and brown plaid to alternate; several blouses, embellished with Leigh's handwork; a neat evening coat with "oyster" plumes; and the gray bengaline

Evelyn Briggs would have thought the things quite inadequate for Miss Mallcott's fashionable school on the Hudson, where she was going, and Edith Worthington had twice the number, but Alison was quite content. She helped Leigh stuff the sleeves with white tissue paper and folded the skirts with care.

"You must let us know just when you wear each one," Mayre said, "and if Cousin Eliza likes them. Of course, her things will be much more

elegant, but elegant things belong to middle age, not youth. I should keep everything simple and refined if I had a million."

Alison's promises were legion.

Came the day of departure. Leigh rose early, wearing her gayest smile, for she knew that her mother was dreading the first break in the family circle. Mayre moved about in a dream, picking up things likely to be forgotten. Caroline was too excited to finish her breakfast, and Hope clung to Alison's hand all morning.

The train left at noon. At eleven, Jimmy Ludlow appeared with a box of candy and a bunch of pink roses which Alison blushingly accepted.

"Mother sent Perkins over with the car," he said, "thought perhaps you would all like to go to the station."

"How perfectly dear of her," Caroline remarked, running to the window to look at the handsome motor. "Would it hold us all?"

"Seven, and then some. I thought — maybe — Alison and I could run down in the dogcart."

"So you can say good-bye, I suppose," Caroline laughed, to Alison's mortification.

A crowd of young people had gathered at the depot, bringing gifts of flowers and fruit, so that when Alison entered her section of the Pullman she found one seat too small for her numerous belongings; but Barbara Aurendell, who was tak-

ing the same train as far as Chicago, offered to share the stateroom which Mr. Donovan had provided.

"It's too bad you didn't take Dickey — you need a canary — and you haven't a bandbox, either," was Mayre's laughing comment. "Well, the best of luck; kiss me dear, Mother and Father are waiting."

Alison leaned over the rail, and the family procession moved up. "Kiss me twice — three times," Hope wailed.

Alison waved a trembling hand, turning to hide smarting tears. The next minute the long train was moving up the track, the engine steaming and puffing.

Jimmy Ludlow stared after it, lost in thought. A voice at his elbow brought him back.

"I — I would just as soon ride home with you in the cart as to go with Perkins," Caroline said softly. "I — I feel bad — too. But you'll see her again this winter, you know — when you go back to college."

Jimmy tucked her willing hand through his arm.

"How about a trot over the mesa this afternoon?" he asked.

Caroline's face was radiant as she answered:

"I'd love it — love it better than anything in the whole world."

CHAPTER XIII

Madame Wakefield

IT was a few weeks after Alison's departure that Caroline, busy writing in her tower room, saw something happening across the street that, for a moment, took away her breath.

The Lodge was being opened!

She jumped up from her desk and ran to the window for a better view. Yes, there was Timms, the crusty old caretaker, flinging open shutters, raising blinds and giving directions to people inside. In the yard men were shaking rugs, whisking the dust from furniture, opening packing cases.

The view was too exciting to witness alone. She flew down the stairs and over to the Briggs house next door. Kathleen was just coming out on the veranda.

"Did you see?" Caroline began, but Kathleen interrupted:

"I was just coming over to tell you. Do you suppose the man who lost his wife is coming back? Maybe he's married again. Let's walk slowly past the house and have a look."

Arm in arm they sauntered across the street. Through the open windows they could see men taking the covers off of furniture, polishing floors, unpacking dishes. A middle-aged woman, evidently a housekeeper, stood in the front hall giving instructions in English strongly tinged with cockney.

"Hopen the box 'ere," she commanded, shaking her finger at a workman. "Don't drag it, scratchin' hup the floors; 'ave a care! The Madame's as particular about other people's things has hif they were her own. Mind the door!"

"The Madame!" Caroline said in a stage whisper, and Kathleen echoed, "Madame."

For a moment they stood gazing into each other's eyes.

"He must have married."

"He must!"

"How exciting. How many years since—since *she* died, Kathleen?"

Kathleen counted. "Four," she decided. "Four last spring."

"A decent time to wait, wasn't it? Do you suppose this one is pretty — and ill?"

"But she said — other people's things ——"

"So she did! He must have rented the house furnished."

Caroline's face fell. She loved a romance.

"Oh, dear, I just wager it's some frumpy old woman with a lot of cats and things. I did hope it was the Englishman. *He* sounded interesting."

The next day Caroline's fears were realized. It was an old woman, but not a frumpy one, and the cats were dogs.

She and Kathleen were strolling past the house after school. It had an atmosphere of living about it. Smoke issued from three of the great chimneys, and again Timms was busy in the yard.

"I do wish we could see the lady of the house," Kathleen sighed.

"Anybody would think you were a book agent," Caroline laughed.

She was still laughing when the French door opened on the side veranda and out stepped a short, stout, roly-poly old lady with a poodle dog in her arms.

Spying the girls, the dog squirmed in her arms and bounded away, giving three peevish staccato barks as he ran towards them.

His remarkable attire made the girls laugh still harder. His slender, shaven little body was encased in a delicate pink silk sweater. His legs had been thrust through the sleeves. He frisked about, his queer, splayed feet pattering softly.

After him, supported by a stout walking stick, came his mistress.

"Ivan," she called, "Ivan Romanoff!" Come back, dear; the grass is wet."

But Romanoff, his head in the air, continued his sharp, naughty barks.

His mistress coaxed, whistled, an amusing breathy whistle that lacked persuasion.

Down the steps she hobbled; she seemed to have a good deal of difficulty in walking. Caroline thought she was too stout to be comfortable.

"Ivan, darling, do you hear me? The grass is wet, and you are not accustomed to this climate."

The voice was deep, cello-like in sweetness.

Madame Wakefield (Caroline afterward learned her name) came toward the fence, leaning heavily on her cane.

"Couldn't I get him for you?" Caroline offered, seeing how the old lady panted for breath. "I reckon maybe you aren't used to this altitude. It always makes you breathe fast like that."

There was an amused smile, full of humor, and then:

"Oh, dear, no, thank you! Ivan is very ungracious to strangers. Aren't you, dear?" She had the dog in her arms again.

Caroline felt a little snubbed, but she answered:

"He's very cunning — and smart looking. Is — is he a French poodle?"

"Dear no, child; he's Russian. Aren't you, Ivan? You see, he's black — and very leggy — and his eyes are red — dark red ——"

Her tones were as staccato as Ivan's yelps. She spoke in short sentences, between asthmatic gasps.

"He looks as if he might be first cousin to a spaniel," Caroline remarked.

It was an intelligent comparison, attracting the keen-eyed old lady. She glanced from Ivan's frowzled head to Caroline.

"Same family," she said, her smile spreading into her ruddy, apple cheeks, English cheeks, hard and weather-beaten.

That night at the dinner table Caroline gave a very good description of the new neighbor.

"She looks as if she might be somewhere around seventy, perhaps a little more, though she's terribly spry — except for one side which seems to be a little stiff — rheumatism, I reckon. Her eyes are round and blue, as blue as yours, Mother, merry eyes that laugh — not at you — but with you. They twinkle all the time. She's disgracefully stout, and she has asthma. I reckon if she comes to you, Major, you had better diet her ——"

Doctor Ravenel bowed gravely, his lips twitching in a smile.

"Thank you for the suggestion, Caroline."

"Her voice," Caroline went on, "is wonderful; honey and cream, and her accent — oh, it's lovely. English! Every word, even the commonest ones were beautiful."

Except from the tower room, Caroline saw little of Madame Wakefield during the next few weeks. Occasionally she glanced across to find her having tea under a tree in the garden (one had to be up high to see the garden, for it was surrounded by a brick wall to insure privacy, the front alone being open) with Ivan on a chair beside her; sometimes his sweater was blue, again white, but he always wore one, regardless of weather.

Since Alison's departure, Caroline had found little time to stroll around the block with Kathleen, for there was always work to be done, or the office to be tended.

Alison wrote frequently: glowing letters of Cousin Eliza, Uncle Finley, and the Seminary, which was a little dull after high-school, but none the less interesting. She missed the family very much and thought of them night and day, especially little Hope. There had always been a tender bond between Alison and Hope.

It was soon after Alison's departure that Hope

began to droop, though Alison's going had little to do with it. She had always been frail. Her eyes grew large and wistful, her smile wan. Doctor Ravenel watched her closely.

Sometimes she would wander into Alison's room to caress her things: a discarded frock still hanging in the closet, an old workbasket which held her first thimble, a favorite book.

Leigh one day found her with Alison's picture in her lap — an exquisite likeness in a round silver frame — her hungry eyes devouring it.

"Isn't she beautiful, Sister?" she asked, holding the photograph out for inspection.

"Lovely, darling."

"Do you think we will ever see her again?"

"Why, of course, Hope; why do you ask that?"

"Oh, I don't know. Sometimes I think I won't." She sighed deeply.

"I am a little anxious about Hopie," Leigh said that evening to her father; she thought his face sobered.

"We must keep her out of doors more," he answered. "I wish I could afford to buy her a pony."

It was a week later that Caroline came home from school to find her small sister in the guest-room bed with Maumy Rachel in close attendance.

"Keep out'n here!" Maumy said, waving a

hand toward the door. "Yer Paw don't want you round catching things till he knows what little missy's got."

That night Hope's fever rose; by morning she was very ill.

The days following were anxious ones for all the family. Mountain fever is not contagious and not always dangerous, but Hope grew alarmingly worse. Mrs. Ravenel took up her abode in the sick chamber, though her husband had insisted upon a trained nurse. Leigh went about the house white and restless, trying to comfort heart-broken old Maumy, run the house and attend to the office, for Doctor Ravenel kept close watch over the little patient on the third floor.

And, strangely enough, it was Caroline who became the mainstay of the family, taking Leigh's place in the household, for Leigh had to be here, there and everywhere. Caroline ran errands, carried ice and hot water to the room above, washed Maumy's neglected dishes, dusted the rooms and whispered words of encouragement in her mother's ear.

"I declare, Caroline seems to have grown up over night," Mayre said to her father. "She has such good common sense. I don't seem to know what to do to be helpful."

Mrs. Ravenel too had proved herself. Her tender mother love flamed to passion. She

could not be induced to leave Hope's side, even for necessary rest or air. Her indolence vanished. She was wise and helpful, courageous in the face of danger. Leigh begged to relieve her.

"My place is here, darling; do not insist upon my leaving Hope. When she is better, I will rest."

And so the days moved on, slowly, intolerably. One day there was hope; the next was filled with despair.

Sometimes Caroline would steal into the big square chamber and stand quietly at the foot of the bed, watching Hope's hot, restless head tossing on the pillow. But she did not cry as Mayre did, or wring her hands. She was calm under her burden; the energy and determination of other days had swerved to definite purpose.

But late one afternoon, when she asked her father if there were hope for her sister's recovery, he had put his head in his hands. He could not answe

She tiptoed away silently and went out to Maumy Rachel's kitchen. The old servant was not there. Caroline found her in her room, a comfortable place in the basement. Maumy Rachel was sitting in her favorite chair, an old hickory rocker that had come along with her from Virginia.

Caroline glanced about; on the bed flamed

the red and green sunrise quilt that Rufus's wife had brought as a parting gift; above it hung the pictures of Maumy's family: Rhodalia and Maria, Dorwin and his wife Mandy, together with their three small pickaninnies. On the old marble-topped table Maumy's Bible lay open; some one had been reading to her from it, Leigh, probably.

"Maumy," Caroline whispered, for the old woman was lost in thought. "Maumy — is Hope going to die?"

Maumy stretched out her arms and Caroline sank down in them, turning her face to the bosom that had never failed of comfort.

"Lammie," Maumy crooned, "lammie."

When the sobs had quieted, she went on:

"It am jes' like this, honey. Sometimes the good Gord He look down on this yere earth and He sees a lubly blossom that He wants up there on high to plant in His big, heabenly garden. (There was a choking pause.) An' He reach down, lammie, way down here — and He picks dat flower — picks it, lammie, fer Hisself up there."

"No, no, Maumy! Not Hope — not my little sister."

"The good Gord can't stop to think who's sister it is, honey. He know best — He know best."

There was a silence broken only by sobs, and then:

"Maumy — I am so sorry I teased her — you remember — at home — how I used to frighten her."

"Don't you think about dat, honey. Dat war just natural debilment — it had to break out, lak the measles er de chicken pox. It war in de system. An' old Maumy's boun' to say dat debilish as y'war, youse been a help to everybody in dis hour a mis'ry — yes'm — Maumy got to say dat."

Caroline slipped away quietly. At the kitchen door she stopped and looked across the avenue. Twilight had fallen.

Something in the great brooding silence quieted her. She slipped across the vacant lots and took the narrow path that led to the hills.

As she walked, she wondered if other places were half so beautiful as Colorado at hush time. She always thought of those few moments just preceding dusk as "hush time." The mountains seemed to feel it, the flowers and trees. Everything stopped; even the quivering aspens along the creek bed. Nature was making its obeisance.

It was an ominous, portentious calm — a gentle stillness. Etched against the gray-blue sky, the mountains flushed with the sun's last glow.

And then, out of the heart of the old peak, a

breeze moved, stirred the stubble grass, the aspens shook; a bird fluttered to its nest, calling to it's mate.

She wondered if death were not like that; a pause — then a beginning — somewhere else, perhaps, as Maumy said, up in His garden.

It was quite dark when she came back. There seemed to be a fluttering in the house; behind closed blinds shadows moved swiftly. Up in the guest room lights flared. She heard a low, heart-rending cry.

It had come, she knew, — hush time for little Hope!

She entered the house as she had left it. The kitchen was empty. Wonderingly she climbed the back stairs, feeling her way through the dark hall to her mother's room.

CHAPTER XIV

Three Years Later

THREE years had passed since that memorable day when little Hope left her beloved family: three rather uneventful years.

Alison's stay of a year had lengthened into three, a part of the time having been spent abroad. Cousin Eliza had proved a warm friend, making it so delightful for her young protégé that she was content to remain indefinitely.

In Paris Alison had met Barbara Aurendel, and together, under Cousin Eliza's chaperonage, they had made a tour of France and Italy. It had been a wonderful excursion, and the home letters were full of entrancing experiences.

"In England," Alison wrote, "I kept an eye out for Great-aunt Caroline, but not knowing her name I was at a disadvantage. Every time I saw a 'personage,' with a pearl necklace or flashing tiara, I imagined it might be she, but of course, without proof, I could not snatch my precious heirlooms."

Between the lines the family caught glimpses of other happenings.

"I wish," she wrote, "that you could know Tevis McElroy. (Cousin Eliza says Mother will remember the McElroys, relatives of the St. Ivans Mayres — wonderful family) who came over on the boat with us. He has been very attentive. I am interested. The McElroys have a beautiful estate just at the edge of the city, marvelous old place with oaks a hundred years old, gardens, drives, charmingly laid out. Mayre would rave. Tevis and his sister Alice are the only children, heirs to the McElroy millions."

And a few months later Cousin Eliza wrote Mrs. Ravenel:

"I realize that I am treading on very sacred ground, dear cousin Emily, when I write to plead the cause of Tevis McElroy, the son of my girlhood friend, Nancy Fairchild. I have known Tevis from babyhood — knitted his first socks — in fact, to go farther back, planned his layette. I know him to be, in spite of his wealth, which in this age is so often a handicap as far as character is concerned, a clean, upright young man, clever and purposeful. Alison has no doubt told you that he is beginning the practice of law, and as for his family — well, I can only say that I consider him quite the equal of a Ravenel or Kirtley. He is to-day writing you and

the doctor for darling Alison's hand in marriage. I trust you will regard the child's affection for him (I am convinced that this is a great love) and consent to an early wedding."

"But what about Jimmy!" Caroline blazed when the astounding news was discussed in the family. "Alison is perfectly horrid to fling him aside just because she has a chance at a millionaire! But it is just like her."

"We do not know that Jimmy has ever really proposed to her," Mayre defended, awed with the grandeur confronting her sister

"Proposed!" Caroline snapped. "Proposed! His eyes proposed every time they glanced at her. They — they ate her up. She knew. And what do you suppose he was taking me horseback riding for — tagging me around and bringing me candy? I knew. He thought I would tell her how nice he was. And he is a heap nicer than this — this interloper." High-school had much improved Caroline's vocabulary.

And it was Caroline who, a few days later, when the parental blessing had been forwarded by letter, (Doctor Ravenel had begged for time to consider the matter, but for once his wife overruled) broke the news to Jimmy.

It was a September afternoon, cool and golden after the usual thunder shower that swept the

valley. Caroline loved those storms: the wild rumblings that resounded from dome to dome of the rocky peaks, the lightning that sprang out of the clouds, snapping through the blackness. She could never get over the feeling that the elements were at war. And she loved the peace that came after — the sweet moist smell of the earth — the dripping leaves — the garden perfumes — the cool sandy walks — ditch boxes singing and overflowing.

"Would you like to go for a tramp over the mesa?" she telephoned to Jimmy. "I have something to — to tell you ——"

"Wouldn't you rather ride?" came the thoughtful invitation.

"I think not. Could we start now — at once?"

They were well on the way when she looked up. Jimmy's eyes met hers.

At sixteen Caroline had lost her childish awkwardness, emerging into promising young womanhood. Colorado had toned her up, added to her stature; she had outdistanced Mayre in height. Her eyes were no longer too large for her face; her cheeks revealed unsuspected dimples when she smiled. Jimmy's prophesy of "looks" had been fulfilled. Some thought her handsomer than Alison. Kindness shone from her eyes; determination sat upon her well-defined, but unobtrusive chin; her shapely mouth was tender and

sincere. She was no longer rude and hoydenish, though there was still a delightful uncertainty about her moods and actions. She was still venturesome, inquiring, romantic; still enthusiastic.

"I have something to tell you, Jimmy."

"Fire!" said the handsome college youth keeping step beside her.

"I am going to — quickly — and have it over. Alison's engaged. To a Southerner ten years older than herself. Tevis McElroy of Richmond."

She had turned her eyes from his; she could not bear to see the pain creep into them.

But Jimmy's voice, strong and vibrant, gave her courage. She met his smile wonderingly.

"So it's really on, is it, regular thing, engagement? Bully for Alison. She wrote me she was awaiting the family's decision."

Caroline gasped.

"And you don't mind — any more than that? I thought — I ——"

"Mind? I am delighted! Alison's a peach, and as to age ——" he looked down at the rosy face beside him questioningly. "You don't think ten years matters, do you, if people really care ——" his voice dropped as if the word were sacred. "Of course — I think seven would be better — perhaps ——"

"You will come?" he asked. *Page* 181.

"You really don't care for Alison? Like that?"

Jimmy's charming smile widened.

"I care a heap, Caroline. So much so that I want to see her happy. But — like that — no — I should prefer her as — as a sister ——"

He stopped suddenly ——

"Finish," she commanded.

"Not to-day."

"Why?"

"Because ——"

He wheeled suddenly and looked deep into the topaz eyes.

"I'll make a date with you, Caroline. I will meet you here two years from this afternoon — at — what time is it — four o'clock. At four o'clock — precisely — if I am living, and finish that sentence. It wouldn't be quite fair to do it now — perhaps even then I may postpone it."

Caroline started to speak, but hesitated; a flush spread from her creamy neck to the roots of her brown hair.

"You will come?" he asked.

They had stopped for a moment; he lingered, waiting for her promise.

"Yes — if I am here, I will come."

He took a notebook from his pocket, and ripping out a leaf, wrote a date upon it. Caroline laughed as she read it.

"Now let's go home and have some of Maumy's muffins," she said quickly. "I heard her say as I came out she was going to make them to-night. Perhaps your mother will come over for tea."

"I think she would be charmed. Maumy's muffins would tempt Jove ——"

"To say nothing of our society — Mother's and Leigh's and ——"

"Caroline's."

"Thank you."

"It will be my last tea with you, too; I leave to-morrow."

Caroline's heart fluttered but she said quietly:

"How nice. It must be wonderful going to college. I hope I may some day. But I shall go West — out through that old gateway over there." She pointed to a cleft in the mountains. "Somehow I always feel that my way lies there — on the other side."

Jimmy drew a sunburned finger across the pucker that perched upon her brow ——

"Over the hills and far away," he laughed.

"Over the hills and far away," she sighed, swinging into step beside him.

An hour later in the tower room, she took a crumpled piece of paper from her sweater pocket and straightening it neatly, pinned it beside a motto that hung there — a homemade

motto that Mayre had embellished for her. The slip of paper read:

September the fifteenth, 19 —
The Mesa
Four o'clock

Caroline looked from the memorandum to her improvised axiom.

"Think straight, look straight, act straight — then do as you please," it advised.

She smiled dreamily.

As of old, the tower room was Caroline's most treasured possession; the old desk, her friend and comforter. She still scribbled. Pigeonholes overflowed with the tide of verse, short stories, dramas that ebbed from her brain. Occasionally she sent forth a bit, sure that a publisher would welcome it warmly, but it always came back.

"Was the Misty Mountain Maid accepted?" Kathleen asked, when a novelette continued *en tour for a month.* She had listened to the reading with awed interest.

Caroline nodded.

"Really? Who accepted it?"

"I did — thankfully — when it came back. The editors were wise. I can do much better ——"

"What did they say?"

A frank smile wreathed Caroline's lips.

"That my spelling was the only sign of genius they could discover."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"How sarcastic and horrid!"

Caroline gave her friend a patient glance.

"You don't understand, Kathy dear," she said. "It is very encouraging to have even an adverse criticism on the margin of a manuscript. It shows that it has been read — and — I am not looking for compliments. I am looking for criticism."

An attitude that argued well for future success.

But the years had not left their telling marks upon Caroline alone. Doctor and Mrs. Ravenel had both aged under the stress of Hope's sudden going, of heavy responsibilities and uncertain health. Colorado had done its part toward improving Doctor Ravenel's lungs. He was in far better health than when he arrived in the mountains; he breathed with less difficulty; his step was more buoyant; his outlook brighter. But cares weighed upon him; sick people fretted him, especially the poor who struggled against heavy odds. His own condition had made him keenly sympathetic. He gave away half that he made and often failed to collect the rest. Business acumen had no place in his make-up.

He was too fine a physician, too interested in his profession to commercialize his talents, to specialize among the rich. Caroline had come by her democracy honestly. He knew neither race nor class.

"It was absurd for you to get up in the night to see Uncle George (an aged Virginia negro who had been ill)," Leigh scolded when the call resulted in a cold.

"Uncle George is a human being," was the quiet answer. "His pain is as gripping as a white man's!"

It was useless to argue. Robert Ravenel would have preferred death in a good cause to rest and neglect of duty.

Maumy Rachel was also changing. Her step was slower, her homesickness a little more poignant, but she seldom murmured. Her loyalty never flagged. Her place was with Miss Em'bly — to the end.

"Y'all gwine be carryin' me out the front door one a these days," she sometimes said, when rheumatism nagged her. "It won't be long. I'se gwine cross ole Jerden fer sure."

Maum Rachel's one desire in life was to have all the honors that were coming to her in death.

"Co'se they won't be anybody in this here wilderness that'll care whether you take me out front or back — but it can be writ home to Vir-

ginny. And I want y'all to lay it on thick. Tell'm how Brother Brown he prayed, and the choir they done sung, and how y'all taken me out the front door. I don't want you to forgit that — *the front door* — same as any Kirtley. My ole Miss (this was to Leigh), your gran'maw, she done promised that years ago. Miss Em'bly, she undastan's."

"We all understand, Maumy dear. Out the front door you go, and every darky in Warrensburg shall know about it," Leigh promised.

"Thankee, honey. I'se gwine trust y'all — I'se gwine trust."

But on well days she was more optimistic.

"Specs I'se gwine outlive y'all," she declared, "every one of you. They won't be anybody to carry me out the front door. Reckon I'll be the las' ole sour apple lef' in the Kirtley orchard. Reckon maybe y'all gwine have to kill me off like old dog Tray."

One day she came to Leigh with a roll of bills done up in a pocket handkerchief.

"You keep this fer me, honey," she begged. "It's to cart my ole bones back to Virginny. I couldn't rest out here with them ole rocks yander a watchin' me. Miss Caroline done wrote Dorwin's wife 'bout havin' a service fer me at home, too. I've saved enough fer a right smart burial — right smart. You don't need to stint it

any — git a wreath if you want to, er a sheaf a wheat — dat's fer ole age — a sheaf with roses maybe."

"A sheaf it shall be, Maum Rachel," Leigh said, and put the money in the bank.

During the three years, Mayre, perhaps, had changed less than others in the family. At nineteen she was as complete a replica of her mother at that age as nature could reproduce. A little below medium height, slender, but with promise of flesh in later years.

Her four years in high-school had been uneventful, patient, plodding years, in which she added as best she could, with limited facilities, to her store of art. In manner she was retiring, shrinking a little from society. It was Caroline who brought young life into the house, never Mayre. She preferred her sketch-book and water colors to people; long walks in the parks and nearby cañons to trivial personalities which made up the general conversation of her friends.

In the summer time her garden occupied her whole attention. It was a beautiful garden, so beautiful that passers-by often stopped to look over the low stone coping with its iron fence. The Virginia roses had bloomed, despite the short season. Zinnias and daffodils, hyacinths and mignonette, petunias and phlox vied with each other in color and fragrance, while the

honeysuckles perfumed the whole neighborhood.

The short, sweet-scented twilight invariably found Mayre on a rustic bench under the peach tree, her hands crossed in her lap, her eyes half-closed and dreamy.

There was a suggestion of haughtiness about Mayre that was at base shyness. She was sensitive in the extreme: a peculiar sensitiveness that is often found in talented people, a feeling of unworthiness, of inability to reach the standard set by a demanding conscience.

Leigh recognized this peculiar quirk and tried in various ways to overcome it. Caroline had no patience with it. By a process of elimination, she reduced it to snobbishness. Mayre disliked ordinary people — she had no patience with boys, no small talk with which to beguile them — she was critical — old-maidish.

But Caroline only half guessed at the real truth. Mayre's nature was too spiritual, too tempermental to find companionship in "ordinary people." Her mind was occupied with lofty ideals, plans to increase the world's beauty. Anything ugly, or ordinary, or commonplace was a blot on God's creation. She could not help feeling that way, any more than she could resist weeding her garden or pruning the peach tree or adding tawny, golden touches to Caroline's costumes.

Leigh was different, more evenly balanced, more fortunate: she had inherited the best that her father and mother had to bestow. She was tender, loving, above all, sympathetic, with an understanding that took in rich and poor. She was never critical — except when her father overworked — never wholly discouraged.

Of all the family she was the most self-less. Her own comfort, her own pleasure, her own desires were the last to be considered. It was Leigh to whom Caroline brought her knotty problems; Leigh to whom Mrs. Ravenel complained about limited means and inefficient help; Leigh who visited her father's poor and made two dollars stretch to five.

So, it was little wonder that one summer moonlit night, on the deserted veranda, when Blair Newland pressed his suit, told her of the love that filled his heart, she answered:

"But I cannot leave Father and Mother and the girls, Blair dear, even — though I care for you — and I do — oh, so much. They need me — more than you do. You are young. You will find some one else — some one stronger — better fitted to be your wife."

Blair understood.

"It is because of that I love you, Leigh," he said tenderly. "Because you are not so strong as the rest; it sets you apart. I want to take

care of you — protect you. I have money enough to save you from hardship and worry. And I need you more than you may think. I am all alone."

For a moment her breath came quick and fast — but duty persisted.

"You don't quite understand," she said, her blue eyes welling with tears. "Of course you can't. Father is so far from strong, I am his other self — really. And mother — she is not constituted to help him — not as I am, you know. She is his inspiration — for her he lives and breathes and ——"

She stopped.

"Don't you see?" she went on, her small white hands clasped together in an agony of feeling. "I must refuse your love — for them. One cannot do wrong and *feel* right. I could not make you happy — knowing their need."

And Blair had taken the trembling hands in his own and wiped away the tears.

"I can wait until you find that my need is even greater than theirs," he said patiently.

CHAPTER XV

The Madame Views Aunt Caroline

ALTHOUGH The Lodge continued to be a never-failing source of interest to Caroline, she rarely saw its occupants. Occasionally Madame Wakefield appeared in the sun parlor, to be served tea by a decorous English maid, picturesque in her black dress, white cap and apron.

Sometimes, in crossing the street, Caroline met a young man emerging from the house, a well-set-up, attractive young man of Jimmy Ludlow's age. He always stepped aside with a pleasant smile and gave her the better part of the sandy walk. There was an expression in his eyes (what she could catch of it through his heavily rimmed, tortoise-shell glasses), that went with her for blocks.

"I wonder what he does there," she thought, as she wended her way to high school. "He looks too well groomed for a servant, and too young for manager. Perhaps he is a relative."

She found out one day in a very unexpected manner. It was shortly after Jimmy's departure: a rare September afternoon, so beautiful that every one who owned a horse, a motor, or a high, red-wheeled dogcart was driving up the long white avenue.

She was nearing The Lodge, when suddenly from out a corner of the low green hedge Ivan Romanoff bounded. He gave her a quick look as he ran toward the avenue, and, evidently interested in her appearance, turned for another view, raising his shaggy head in a saucy bark.

It was an ill-timed glance. Caroline saw the danger instantly, and dropping her books on the pavement, rushed to his rescue.

Ivan was not used to motors, except in the garage where they were always silent, and the quick, warning blasts from a chauffeur's horn bewildered him.

Caroline never quite knew how the accident happened. It was all sudden and disturbing, but when she regained her senses she found herself being led from the avenue with poor little Ivan's mangled body in her arms, and a nice English voice, the most beautiful, musical voice was saying:

"My dear young lady, you risked your life for the little chap; really, you know, it was wonderful to see you do it — such nerve. You must

come into the house with me and let Madame, my aunt, speak with you. She will be no end grateful ——"

"But I wasn't in time, so she hasn't anything to — to thank me for," Caroline said while two luminous tears welled in her eyes.

The young man looked at her in bewilderment.

"But it might have been you we are carrying in. Jove, what an escape! It was a ripping dash. I was after the little beggar, too. It takes a houseful to watch him ——"

"Your aunt will be grieved, won't she?" Caroline asked (the young man had taken the dog from her); "she seemed fond of him."

"Oh, I say, no end, yes! Ivan's her creed, her law and gospel. But when one has mothered all the children in the family and seen them settled in homes of their own — nieces, nephews, orphans and servants — why, one is entitled to the affection of a heathen god — isn't one? I beg your pardon — my name is Feveral, and yours?"

"Caroline Ravenel."

"This way, please, Miss Ravenel (they were in the charming, softly curtained hall), and sit down, won't you? I will have James bring you some wine at once ——"

"Oh, not wine — please. Just cold water. And I think I won't stop now. Your aunt will be too distressed."

The sentence was left suspended, for Mr. Feveral had taken the dog away.

Caroline sank down on the edge of a rich velvet chair, then seeing how dust-begrimed she was, moved to a less pretentious one. She began to realize what a risk she had taken when she glanced at herself in the gold-framed mirror above the table where young Feveral had thrown his gray tweed cap. Her dress was torn, a long rent that Leigh's careful darning would never hide; the hairpins had fallen from her hair, letting it loose over her back. Across her cheek there was a slight abrasion (she never learned how she received it), and her hands were soiled and wet with Ivan's blood.

"Oh, I — I am a sight," she said aloud and jumping up made her way from the house quickly.

It was an hour later that Alfred Feveral located her (perhaps he hadn't as much difficulty as she imagined) and begged her to run over to the house for a moment. Madame was very anxious to see her.

The stout old lady was still bathed in tears; her merry eyes had lost their sparkle, but she rose and stretched a welcoming hand.

"Alfred has told me of your splendid bravery, dear child," she said. "How can I ever thank you?"

"You mustn't try. I did so little. I am only sorry that I wasn't quicker."

"You risked your life — your life — for little Ivan. I can never forget it — never!"

"Perhaps if I had thought about my danger I wouldn't have done it," Caroline said frankly. "My old darky Maumy says I've got 'a nat'rl appitude for acting first and thinking afterward.' I reckon maybe she's right."

Madame Wakefield caught the Southern accent, noted the softly modulated voice.

"You are from the South?" she inquired.

"Virginia. We came here five years ago for my father's health. He was quite ill then, but now he is almost well — Colorado is so wonderful."

"And your name?"

"Ravenel. My father is Doctor Robert Ravenel. We live almost across the street."

"I see. Virginia, you say. May I ask what part?"

"A small place called Warrensburg. Nearly the whole town was once owned by my grandfather, but after the war we lost a lot of property — most Southerners did, you know ——"

Madame Wakefield sank back upon the sofa again. She seemed crushed and weary, but she glanced often at the charming face opposite. When Caroline turned to speak with Alfred

Feveral, she became more bold. Her keen eyes traversed the animated profile slowly, wonderingly.

"You are English, I reckon," she heard her saying to Alfred. "You speak as if you were. We have relatives in England — at least we once had — no doubt my Great-aunt Caroline is dead now. She was Mother's aunt. She married when she was only eighteen, and went over there to live. We have a lovely portrait of her. You'd like it, I am sure. She seems so good-natured. So sort of human, you know. Her smile always says, "Howdy, I hope I see you well." They think in the family that I look a little like her — *a very little.* I am more Ravenel than Kirtley ——"

She broke off suddenly for Madame Wakefield had straightened and was peering down at her with wide, interested eyes.

"I beg your pardon. I am talking an awful lot, I know. I thought perhaps it might take your mind from — from your trouble. Father always says you mustn't talk disease to sick people, it's bad for them, and Maumy Rachel — she's my old nurse — has a saying — all negroes have ——"

"Yes?" Madame's voice was eager.

"Maumy says 'you must never speak of a rope in a house where there has been a hanging.' Its

just a sort of proverb, you know, but it applies to a lot of things ——"

Alfred's laugh rang out low and clear.

"I say, Madame, why haven't we known Miss Ravenel before. Here we've been dying of ennui, with an antidote right across the street. I hope that you will adopt us, Miss ——"

"Call me Caroline, please. I am hardly grown up yet. You see, I have three older sisters. I had four — but — but the little one — our darling Hope left us three years ago ——"

"I am very sorry." Madame's voice was full of sympathy. "You were speaking of this aunt in England. What was her name? It is barely possible I may have chanced upon her. I know a great many people ——"

"That's the funny part of it. We can't for the life of us remember her married name. Mother can't, even. It was all so long ago. But we have a lot of fun about her. My sister Alison is some day going to inherit her diamonds and pearls. Mayre's going to Paris to study art with the pile she leaves her, and I ——"

"Yes, and you?" Madame seemed very interested.

"I used to think I would take my money and buy a circus, but I have rather outgrown that idea. I think now perhaps a private menagerie would be enough, with a baby wildcat, — you can

get them here in the mountains, a few good dogs, and a pony."

"You like dogs?" It was Alfred who asked the question.

"I love them. We have one: Chow, an Airedale. He is very smart. I fear I must be going now. Perhaps, if you really have been bored and lonesome, you would come over some afternoon and have tea with us on the veranda. Maumy has quite a reputation on her corn bread and muffins. I think you would like them. Mother has never made calls since — since my sister died — but I will ask Leigh to run over. Leigh is my young lady sister — a perfect saint."

It was just two weeks later (Leigh had willingly made the call) that Madame Wakefield and her nephew came to tea.

Maumy donned her best white apron, her snowiest cap. It was too cool for the veranda, so a cheerful fire was laid on the old brass and irons in the drawing-room.

The hour passed quickly. Madame Wakefield was entertaining, her nephew delightful. He seemed particularly interested in Mayre's drawings, which Caroline had insisted upon being shown, and in her charming garden.

"You have a real gift," he declared, as they strolled through the grounds, viewing the artistic arrangement of flowers and shrubs. "I have

had some experience in landscaping, myself. At home we make rather a specialty of it. Those groups and masses over there. Excellent! And the open center! Capital!" He laughed pleasantly.

"By the way," he added, "walk back with us, and I will give you some textbooks and magazines on the subject." He included Caroline.

In the hall Madam Wakefield paused in front of Grandfather Kirtley's portrait.

"Your daughter spoke to me about her ancestors," she said to Mrs. Ravenel. "This is your paternal grandfather?"

Caroline entered at that moment.

"Please look at Great-aunt, too, Madame Wakefield. You remember I told you about her — up there in the niche. Isn't she lovely — just everything that a girl ought to be?"

Madame Wakefield went a few steps nearer, holding her lorgnette to her short-sighted eyes. She seemed warm and puffy. Her apple cheeks were scarlet.

"Very, indeed."

"Don't you like her smile? I do hope if she's passed on she took that smile with her. It would cheer up most any angel — wouldn't it? Maybe angels don't need cheering, though. I love that twinkle; her eyes make me think of stars. When I was very little, I used sometimes to be rather

naughty — very naughty," she corrected, "and when I passed Great-aunt on the stairs, she seemed to be laughing at me. Once — I remember the time very well — it annoyed me so that I put my tongue out at her — you know — as naughty children do."

As usual, Caroline was going back into the family saga. Maumy gave her a gentle nudge as she passed with the luster cups on the round mahogany tray.

Madame studied the portrait for some minutes. "Very interesting," was her only comment, as she opened the black fan suspended from her heavy wrist. Her face was still red.

Caroline was eager to view the house across the way, and when Madame suggested that Alfred show them through, she was delighted.

She had seen handsome houses before, but there was an air about The Lodge that delighted her very soul.

"It is so beautiful," she said, glancing about the living room. Back of the long deep sofa ran an equally long table with two handsome lamps upon it; books and magazines added to its interest. There was another table at one end that also held books and Alfred's pipes and cigars. A magazine had been left open. Caroline almost wanted to drop down on the soft cushions beside it and continue where some one had left

Madame studied the portrait for some minutes. *Page* 200.

off — she knew that someone had — it was thrown down so carelessly.

But it was the sitting room upstairs, replica of the one below, only more cozy and intimate, that fascinated her. A sleepy fire burned on a generous hearth; comfortable chairs were drawn close; a shaggy dog rose as they entered, and showed his pink tongue in a prodigious yawn. A white cat with a snuggling kitten slept on a mulberry velvet cushion — slept as if dogs were natural friends — not enemies.

There was ample time to look about while Mayre and her host pored over books and magazines. When they did turn, they found her dreaming over a man's portrait above the mantel.

"I like him: almost as well as Great-aunt," she said, roused to conversation. "Please tell us about him."

Alfred's eyes rested sadly on the handsome face above.

"My brother — Charles — eldest in our family, poor chap. He lost his wife here a few years ago. Tough luck. Never's got over it. They were sweethearts from childhood. One of those romantic affairs that — stick."

"Oh!" The word came in a smothered gasp. Caroline was squirming with interest. She wanted to ask a dozen questions which good taste forbade.

But later, when Mayre and Alfred had gone below to look at shrubs and the arrangement of flower beds, Madame Wakefield came into the room and sat down by the fire. Caroline took her courage in her hands and asked about the aristocratic looking gentleman above.

And — well — perhaps it was because Madame was in a mellow, reminiscent mood, or perhaps she felt drawn to Caroline because of poor little Ivan; at any rate she told her the sad story of Charles Feveral and his girl wife: of their happy childhood, long courtship, and the tragic end so far from home and friends.

"These are all his things," she said, with a wave of her plump, jeweled hand: "portraits, rugs, bric-a-brac, pictures. They brought them all across the sea, expecting to make their home here. But after she went ——" There was another wave of the hand, a gesture more eloquent than words.

"He couldn't bear the sight of them," Caroline finished.

"Exactly. The house was locked for two years. Then Alfred and I came over — we were touring America. I had lived here once, many years ago. We liked this enchanting spot so much that we lingered on."

"Is Mr. Feveral through college?"

"Oh, yes; he was graduated several years ago."

Caroline's democracy got the better of her manners.

"Isn't he going to work — now that he is through?" An idle man was an abomination in her sight.

"Dear, yes; he is my secretary. He transacts a great deal of business for me. I sometimes think I keep him too busy for a young man just through with college work. He should have had a year to play."

"But he has traveled. That is such fun. How I should love it. When I get my fortune ——"

She laughed at the old joke, and, though Madame did not join, her lips broke into a smile.

The friendship between the two families ripened. After that first visit there were long rides together. Madame's motors accomodated so many: picnics in the cañons, tea parties in the sun room; cozy chats before the upstairs sitting-room fire. That, perhaps, was the greatest treat to Caroline. She loved to dream over Charles Feveral's portrait, muse on his hope and disappointments.

Alfred came to see Mayre often, but not Mayre alone. He never singled her out, but they had a great deal in common. And Mayre blossomed under his tutelage. Her drawings were bolder, more original; her smile brighter. Sometimes she sang (or tried to) as she dusted the drawing-

room or wiped the dishes for Maumy Rachel. Mayre's singing was the joke of the family. Her voice seemed to have a natural aversion to pitch, and it took all sorts of liberties with keys; but then Mayre was never like other people.

"You are off again," Caroline would laugh, as she struggled with a topical song, and Mayre would fling:

"I know the words — that's more than you do." On several occasions Caroline had convulsed her sisters in church by applying her own methods to the hymns; words were a mere incident in the singing. When she couldn't find the hymn book, or a stranger monopolized it, she made them up.

It was after she had known Alfred Feveral a month or more that Caroline said one night to Mayre:

"I know now what it is I like about his eyes. I used to wonder when he passed me on my way to school. It's enthusiasm! It leaped into them when he stepped aside to give me the path; he liked doing it — it interested him. Enthusiasm! That's a wonderful possession. I believe it shows in people's eyes first of all — it opens them, takes off the scales."

And Mayre, humming her crooked little tune, smiled happily.

CHAPTER XVI

Alison Returns

IT was just a month before Christmas that the wonderful news came. Mayre was so excited that she met Caroline at the corner on her return from school. If Mayre hadn't been a Kirtley, and so well-bred, she would have shouted it, but she didn't. She waited until Caroline caught step beside her; then she turned.

"Guess what's happened," she said, her blue eyes roused from their usual serenity.

"What, Mayre; tell me?"

"Guess!"

"Maumy Rachel's going back to Virginia?"

"No."

"Father's performed a big operation?"

"No."

"Mother's ill."

"Would I be looking so happy if Mother were ill?"

"Oh, tell me. Tell me quickly! Is it something wonderful? Has the Waucaweta (the Waucaweta was a mining claim that was some

day to outrival the great-aunt's fortune) struck gold?"

"Alison's coming home! She will be here tomorrow. She telegraphed from Chicago. Oh, I can't wait to see her. I just simply can't!"

And although it was four o'clock in the afternoon and the highway full of drivers and pedestrians, Caroline executed a cakewalk on the sidewalk.

"Mayre! Oh, joy, joy! We will all be together again — all of us ——"

For an instant a shadow crept across her bright face and she looked away toward the east, to Evergreen, where little Hope slept, but her happiness was too keen to be overclouded.

"Leigh feels sure that she is coming home to be married, and that we won't have her long. But won't it be wonderful to see her? Do you suppose she has changed much in three years? Cousin Eliza always writes how beautiful she is. I shall be so proud to introduce her to Alf (it was Alf now) and the Madame. Alison always was 'quality,' Maumy says, even when she was a baby."

Caroline found the household in a flutter. Maumy Rachel was up to her elbows in pie crust, cookies and doughnuts.

"Lucky I got my fruit cake and plum puddin' locked up and ready," she said, as she rolled

and patted and trimmed. "Lucky fer y'all dat I 'sisted on makin' extry ones, too. I haid a hunch — yes'm — a hunch — I gits 'em — I had one 'fore we come out hyre to this Gord-forsook country. I done dream fer three nights 'bout climbin' hills — long steep hills, and every time I git one foot up t'other would slip back. I knew what that meant."

"What, Maumy?" Caroline was always interested.

"Why, hit meant I was a-comin' out here to these mountains, but dat I was gwine to leave my heart and soul and — and feet — they's always been planted in Virginny, at home. I ain't never been here altogether — I jes' brought my haid and my ole eyes and my han's — dat's all — de rest ob me is down in Dixie. I been thinking to-day dat if y'all could git 'long without me, I'd git Miss Alison to take me back ——"

"Oh, Maumy dear ——"

Caroline's tones were pleading.

"I know it ain't right, honey, but I'se gittin' ole. I ain't sayin' I'se gwine, mebby Miss Alison she don't want me, an' I ain't never gwine live with Dorwin's wife. She's yaller. But we'll see. Don't you git to worryin'. Maumy ain't gone yet."

"If you go, I'll go too, Maumy," Caroline said. "It would not be home without you. I know

when I was little you didn't care about me much — I reckon I did keep you busy, but — but I loved you — all the time, Maumy ——"

And Maumy, regardless of floured hands, walked over to where Caroline was standing and gave her a hug.

"You sure was a sassy young' un," she said gravely, "but you've improved. I shouldn't be 'sprised if you turned out a Kirtley yit — you've got the makin's. — Sometimes I kin see your grandmaw in you, and sometimes yer Aunt Marybel, and sometimes yer Uncle Gilbert, yer maw's brother — but most the time I see — What you reckon, Missy?"

"I don't know, Maumy."

"Yer paw. And that's a compl'ment fer you. An' — I don't know but that I'd almos' as soon see you a Ravenel — as a Kirtley — if you was like him, chile. I ain't never seen his match on this yere earth. He's plum too good fer this hard ole worl'."

"I think that too sometimes, Maumy," Caroline whispered, and left the kitchen with swimming eyes.

They expected to find Alison changed, of course, but they were not prepared to greet the very elegant young person who stepped from the train and gazed about as if the surroundings were totally strange. A neat colored maid,

carrying parcels and wraps, stood just behind her.

"Mother darling — and Father — and oh, girls, how lovely to see you!" was her greeting, but it was given in such low, correct tones, with such a polite handshake, that Caroline stood amazed.

"Why don't you fling your arms around us and hug us?" she asked, eyeing the stylish tailored suit her sister was wearing, the smart hat and gloves.

"Wait until I get you home, you dears," Alison said. "I dislike public exhibitions — so vulgar. Mother, you are not looking well. Have you been ill? And Leigh dear, you are tired."

Her appraising eyes had swept them all; each had been catalogued: Caroline was amazingly good looking; Mayre old-maidish and prim; her father in better health.

"Oh, Abbie," she said, turning to the maid, "this is my family." Abbie bobbed her head and showed her gleaming teeth in a smile.

"Abbie has been my maid ever since we went abroad, and Cousin Eliza simply would not permit me to come home without her; she ——"

"Your maid!" Caroline's tone rose above the rumble of the on-moving train.

"Yes, dear — not so loud." Alison laid a finger on her lips with a warning "Ssh." "I was going to say that Abbie will be very useful to us all."

Mayre had expected that Alison would come back into the old room where they had held so many pleasant conferences, but Alison was of a different mind.

"Would you object to my having the guest room while I am at home, Mother dear?" she asked. "I have been so used to spreading out, and I have so many trunks — I will explain about them later — Abbie could have the little room across the hall, perhaps. I am so accustomed to having her near."

Mrs. Ravenel quickly consented. It was Doctor Ravenel who watched his second daughter with clouded eyes. He had said very little, except to inquire for her health.

Directly after lunch, Alison went to her room; Caroline, as of old, trotted after her.

"I am going to watch you unpack," she said, "I am dying to see your pretty things."

"Abbie will unpack, dear," was the inhospitable answer. "Come up a little later. I am very tired. I should like to rest for an hour or two. We shall have so many visits. I shall be here until after Christmas, you know."

"But I want to see Tevis McElroy's picture. Couldn't you just show me that?"

"After while, darling — please."

Caroline turned, feeling ten rather than sixteen. She wandered back to the drawing-room

where her mother sat before the fire. There was a pleased smile on Mrs. Ravenel's serene face.

"Mother," she began, pulling a hassock to her feet,"do you remember the day we first came into this house and you said something about people being refined — *re-fined?*. I wanted to know what the word meant."

"Yes, dear."

"I know now."

Mrs. Ravenel turned expectantly.

"It means — Alison."

"That's a very pretty compliment, darling."

"I didn't mean it that way. I — I hate it. She's all covered up with polish. I would like to stick a pin in her and see if she's real — if it would bring blood ——"

"Caroline!"

"Oh, Mother, if that's what finishing means, being *re-fined,* so that you just shake hands with your own folks at the depot after you have been away three years — for fear somebody will think you vulgar — I — want to be common!"

"But she was very affectionate when we reached home, dear. And you must remember that Alison was never demonstrative."

"I remember."

"I am delighted with her improvement. Her manners are charming, quite correct."

"Made to order, yes — run in a mold like forty-

'leven others. She's lost her individuality. She makes me tired!"

Caroline rose, gave the hassock a shove and went into the office.

Her father was sitting by the west window, looking at the mountains. Caroline sniffed the odor of his lighted cigar.

"I am glad you are smoking, Major," she said. "It always mellows you. May I talk?"

With courtesy inborn, Doctor Ravenel rose and pulled up a chair for his daughter.

"Oh, Major," she sighed, sinking into it, "why can't people be polite — like you are — without being polished."

"What's the matter, honey?"

"Are you pleased with Alison, Major?"

Doctor Ravenel puffed for a few minutes in silence. Caroline seemed preoccupied, but occasionally she reached for, and caught on a slender brown finger the rings of smoke that left his lips. Years of practice had made her an adept.

Neither spoke. The Major's eyes were inscrutable.

"Let's give Alison a chance, honey," he remarked finally. And Caroline knew that the conversation was closed, so far as her sister was concerned.

Caroline's conscience smote her a little when

Alison came down to tea, lovely and fragrant in a correct afternoon gown. The photograph in a silver frame which she carried in her hand was deposited in Caroline's lap.

"Here, dear, is your new brother-in-law," she said. "I hope that you will love him as much as he expects to love you. Tell me how you like him."

Caroline studied the face closely. Abbie had followed Alison with her hands full of packages; there was ample time to consider the face while gifts were distributed.

Alison's perfect taste had, as usual, manifested itself. There was a gold thimble for her mother, which would have been most acceptable if she had not already owned two; a dozen fine, hand-initialed handkerchiefs for Leigh; a small, well-executed water-color for Mayre; and for Caroline——"

Caroline almost held her breath when Alison put the small jewel case in her hand, saying to her:

"This is from Cousin Eliza. I told her one day about your having given your pearl ring to a little sick girl, and she insisted that you must have this. It is one Uncle Finley gave her soon after they were married. It was so generous of her to send it."

Caroline pressed the spring in the crimson

velvet case and gave an ecstatic "Oh!" The family crowded close.

"How exquisite," Mrs. Ravenel said, peering through her lorgnette.

Caroline slipped the ring on her finger. It was elegant without being pretentious: a central pearl, surrounded by a row of smaller ones, the whole bordered with a thin line of black enamel.

Caroline did not speak for a moment; if she had lifted her softly darkening eyes, the family might have seen tears.

"It was wonderful of her," she said, when she could find voice.

"And are you not going to look at my engagement ring?" Alison asked. "It is worth seeing."

She held out a slender white hand. A large solitaire glistened on her third finger. There were more exclamations. Even Doctor Ravenel fished for his glasses and had a look.

Then the photograph was passed around for inspection. Mayre and her mother praised the new son-in-law-to-be. "He was fine-looking, alert, and he showed race," they thought.

Caroline said nothing.

"What do you think, honey?" Alison asked.

"I don't know. You can't tell from a picture. I would rather look in his eyes and shake hands before I judge. By the way, I forgot to tell you that I invited the neighbors in to welcome Alison

home. Mrs. Ludlow and Blair, the Madame and Alf — I see them coming now. Oh, Mother, don't worry; Maumy knows, she's making tea-cakes, and I told her to cut a wee bit of fruit cake and open some of her raspberry shrub. You don't mind, do you? This is an occasion."

"Abbie, you may help Maumy serve," Alison said, and the girl went toward the kitchen obediently.

It was a pleasant half-hour that followed. Madame Wakefield seemed duly impressed with Alison's "finish," and Mrs. Ludlow raved in her whole-hearted way about her general improvement. "She had grown so — changed — was really handsomer — had so much poise. It was a shame Jimmy wasn't at home to extend his congratulations."

Alison talked England to Madame and Alf (she had spent three weeks in London, so she knew all about it), becoming enthusiastic, that is, as enthusiastic as good manners would permit about Paris and Vienna. She even aired a knowledge of pictures. That brought her to the remark:

"And by the way, I had a queer notion one night at a party that I saw Great-aunt Caroline. Cousin Eliza had some delightful friends who were entertaining us at dinner, with a dance after. This old lady, looking like a dowager

empress, strolled in, attended by two servants. She was very gouty — or something, I forgot what they said, but at any rate she positively looked—Kirtley! She was short, round and stout, with large blue eyes dancing with mischief ——"

"I beg your pardon, Madame Wakefield, I presume Caroline has introduced you to our illustrious ancestor — Mrs. Ludlow knows her." Alison stopped in the narrative and glanced at the portrait in the hall.

"As I was saying — please pardon the family history — her eyes danced with fun and spirit. And she was literally loaded with jewels: *my* pearls—the pearls are to descend to me, Madame Wakefield—hung in a rope about her short, thick neck; oh, really absurd, I assure you. Her fat, purplish hands were crowded with rings: diamonds, emeralds, turquoise — yes, really — the most execrable taste! I remember Lord Algie Townsend, who was sitting next to me, said that she always wore everything but the kitchen range — and her dress ——"

Alison paused for breath, and Maumy Rachel beckoned to Caroline.

In the hall the negro's voice fell to a frightened whisper.

"Fer the love of Gord, Missy, git Miss Alison to quit that clatter. That ole lady what-y'-may-call-'er's gwine have a fit in a minute. She

gwine throw hit right here in the drawin'-room. She's as purple as a gobbler's wattles when he's gittin' ready to fight. Lord sake's she's English! honey, English! Miss Alison she done stock up on manners down in Richmon', but she's pow'ful low on common sense."

Caroline went back. Alison still talked:

"Her dress really was the funniest of all. A dreadful shade of green, with spangles on it, beads or something. Over her huge form it made one think of the ocean rippling — spreading — It overflowed her chair, billowed."

"Alison, will you come to the telephone, please?" Caroline ventured.

"In a moment, dear."

"And her tiny little feet. Oh, I must really tell you about her feet. Kirtley feet, Mother, with ridiculous, high-arched insteps — so tiny that when she walked she limped painfully. They weren't large enough to hold her up — they twinkled under the green skirt like ——"

Caroline glanced at Madame Wakefield.

"Pardon me, Alison," she said politely, "but I think perhaps Mr. Aurendel would like to know something about Barbara ——"

Alison made her excuses prettily. They had reached the telephone when Caroline said:

"I wanted to get you out of there. You are hurting Madame Wakefield's feelings. She is

English. She thinks you are making fun of her country women; do stop, please!"

Alison's mask dropped for a minute.

"Why, the silly old creature," she said irritably. "How utterly absurd ——"

But she went back and spent a half-hour praising English gardens, English country homes and English hospitality. Madame Wakefield recovered from her former mood. Her eyes became merry. In the hall, as she was leaving, she stopped for a moment before Aunt Caroline and smiled up at her.

"So you think she's old and fat and wheezy, do you, Miss Alison? Well, well, I dare say she is. Asthmatic, no doubt — but not dowdy, as you Americans say. Never that."

"Never," Caroline whispered.

Madame turned, and taking Caroline's small hand in her own, squeezed it warmly.

"And I can't see those blue eyes daring a green frock, eh, Caroline ——"

"Oh, no, Madame."

"Nor ropes of pearls, rings and miscellaneous jewels ——"

For some reason Alison grew pink to the tips of her shell-like ears, and Maumy gathering up the cups in the drawing-room, leaned sidewise to catch the old lady's words, not alone her words, but her untranslatable expression.

CHAPTER XVII

Maumy Has a Secret

THE more Caroline saw of Madame Wakefield, the better she liked her. And her feeling seemed to be reciprocated, for she was often invited to The Lodge; not only to The Lodge, but to drive in the elegant closed car that defied winter winds; to tea parties in the cheerful sun room; best of all, to see an occasional play or a light opera.

That was the greatest joy of all, those evenings in Madame's stall. To be sure she sometimes felt conspicuous, for Madame always insisted upon sitting back (she loved to watch the changing emotions in her young guest's face), content to view the stage from an obscure corner.

Maumy Rachel also liked Madame Wakefield. Negroes are intuitive. They are not always able to account for their tastes, but they are seldom mistaken or imposed upon.

"What is it you like about her, Maumy?" Caroline asked one Saturday morning, when she was helping in the kitchen.

"Oh, I dunno, Missy; I jes' nat'ally admire her ways. She ain't no English-*born* and riz! No, ma'am! I got a hunch she was brought up in Dixie. Sometime y'all notice how she talks—sof' and low and full, with pretty little tricks to her words, and the other day she say to me when I passes de beaten biscuit, 'Maumy,' she says, 'I ain't et such biscuits as these since I was a little girl,' an' I spoke up quick an says: 'Reckon you must have lived down South den, Miz Wakefield' ——"

"You should have said Madame ——"

"'I reckon you must know something 'bout Dixie ef you like beaten biscuit and corn pone.'"

"And what did she say?"

"She never said nothin', but her red cheeks got redder, an' her hand shook consi'ble when she swaller her tea. Sometimes I got a feelin', ——"

"What, Maumy?"

"Hungh?"

"What kind of a feeling?"

Maumy's lips became a straight line.

"Nothin' I'se gwine tell, honey. Nothin' I'se gwine tell!"

"Why not?" Caroline begged.

But no amount of coaxing could dislodge the "feelin'."

Early November found the family busy with plans for Alison's wedding. The date had been

set for early January, and, although the greater part of the trousseau had come in the large trunks from Richmond, there were the innumerable odds and ends that wear the nerves of a household at such a time.

Leigh became a little whiter, a little thinner. Often she walked with such effort that Caroline threw an anxious arm about her and helped her climb the stairs. Her eyes held starry visions, and sometimes, as they gazed on Alison, they filled with tears.

One night after the others had retired, Caroline crossed the hall in slippers and kimono and perched herself on Leigh's cozy couch.

"I want to talk to you, Sister," she said, "and I don't want you to get angry, will you?"

"Why should I be angry, darling?"

"Because I am going to be terribly personal and say things that will shock you. First of all, I am going to ask you something right straight out. Do you love Blair — and does he love you?"

Leigh caught her breath quickly. She tried to laugh.

"Absurd child," she said and patted Caroline's brown head.

"Tell me. I want to know."

"Well, dear, if I were stronger — and Mother didn't need me so, I might — yes — I might think

of him in that way. We are so congenial. We like so many of the same things ——"

"I knew it. Leigh, now I am going to shock you — don't jump, or scold until I finish. Mother's got to wake up — and I've got to do the waking."

"Caroline!" The word came with a gasp. The thought was blasphemous.

"She's been asleep ever since you were born. Maumy took care of you until you were old enough to take care of the rest of us. Mother — well — Mother, — bless her she doesn't realize, just handed over her responsibilities. I didn't understand when I was little. It's only lately that I've begun to think about it — figure it all out. Mother's got to be jarred ——"

"Caroline, I forbid you to say another word."

"You can't. It is too late. I've said it, haven't I? When this wedding is over, I am going to talk with her ——"

"Go to bed, dear. It is very late and I must be up early in the morning."

"Some morning you won't be able to get up, Sister."

"Nonsense."

"It is true. You are getting thinner and thinner."

"Good night, darling."

"Oh, I am going; you needn't push me. You

know what they used to say when I was little: if I once got an idea in my head ——"

"Get it out, Caroline."

"I will — don't worry! Sweet dreams." She reached down (Leigh had dropped on the couch) and took the wan face between her cool brown hands. "I love you, dear. If I should live to be a million I couldn't pay you ——"

But Leigh had buried her face in the soft cushion and was weeping softly.

Caroline tiptoed out. "I am glad she's taking time to cry," she mumbled, when she had closed her own door. "It will do her good. Dear, dear Leigh. What would we do without her?"

She sat at her window, staring into the night for some time. "I suppose I am presumptuous," she thought, "to try to tell Mother — but Leigh must have her happiness. I could help Father, if only Mother would manage the house, see to the buying and the servants. But I can't do it all, not with my lessons. — Mayre isn't much good with her drawing and her daydreams, though she dusts beautifully. Maumy is giving out — she's old — she ought not to work so hard at her age."

Difficulties did seem to be multiplying.

"Don't you really think we should have an extra maid during these busy days, Mother?" Alison asked one morning.

"Yes, we should, dear, but Leigh tells me that

collections are very slow. I don't know why, but people always pay their physicians after everything else has been settled, — the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker." Her laugh was mirthless.

"But for just a month, dear; you see, Cousin Eliza has done so much there will be little expense, except for the wedding ——"

"Your father wishes you to have all that is necessary. He spoke of it to me this morning."

"Then let us have another maid, Mother. I need Abbie, with so much entertaining going on, and besides, after all, she is really a lady's maid not a second girl."

A few days later a young "western darky" was installed. Maumy's face hardened.

"I don't 'prove of these here western sisters of mine," she complained to Caroline. "They's too uppidy; they don't know their place."

Caroline had ample time to study her beautiful elder sister during those fleeting, care-filled days, often marvelling at her ease and light-heartedness.

Alison always breakfasted in bed. Abbie took up a cup of coffee and a roll at eight o'clock. She called it a Continental breakfast. At eleven there was usually something more: a poached egg on toast, or a couple of Maumy's wonderful flannel cakes with maple syrup. Alison never ate lunch;

she dieted between twelve and tea-time. Sometimes, when she was invited out, as she was often at present, she broke this rule, but never at home.

At noon she rose and read the latest novel while Abbie polished her nails or curled her hair. Sometimes in the afternoon, between teas and dinners, she whipped lace on dainty lingerie or initialed linen, which she had learned to do beautifully, or wrote long letters to Tevis McElroy. Three years of luxury had made a sybarite of her.

Occasionally she ran an anxious finger across Leigh's troubled forehead.

"You mustn't frown so, darling," she would say, her fragrant, rosy finger deep in the telltale line, "it makes you old and unattractive. You really should rub cold cream on your face. Take a half-hour for it and see what a difference it makes. I will send Abbie down some night."

But Abbie never came; her hours were filled to overflowing.

"Alison doesn't belong to our family any more," Caroline thought, noting varied exhibitions of selfishness. "She's like — like an orchid — set in a bouquet of violets. She overtops up. But I like violets better — they are sweeter."

Sometimes she spoke to Leigh about it, but Leigh always said:

"It is so easy to become spoiled, dear, and I dare say we would, too, if we were beautiful and petted; besides, we must remember that Cousin Eliza lost her only child and has showered affection upon Alison. We must not be too critical."

That was like Leigh; always excusing, covering up, hiding faults and, if possible, discovering virtues.

Christmas passed in a hazy blur. If it had not been for Madame Wakefield's kindness, it is doubtful whether the day would have been observed at all. She invited the family for dinner. Even Maumy Rachel and Abbie were included, a special table having been provided in a corner of the spacious kitchen. There were gifts for all — unpretentious things that carried no obligation — and later in the evening there was the usual Christmas supper before Doctor Ravenel's wide hearth, where Madame, Alfred, and Blair gathered with the family. Maumy fairly outdid herself on her creamy chocolate and baked Virginia ham.

"I am beginning to feel as if Madame were almost a relative," Caroline said to Maumy, as she buttered sandwiches and cut cake.

Maumy turned her face to hide a smile.

"Why do you laugh, Maumy?"

"Can't a pusson smile, honey, if they wants to?"

"I don't see anything to laugh at in that remark."

"You don't know all dat's gwine on down in the bottom of my mine, lammie, that's all. My ole gray matter, hits on de rampage lately; hits ben recomemberin, and 'vestigatin' an'——"

She broke off, and then went on:

"I'se gettin' ole, Missy — ole! When you begin livin' in the past, why, that's a sure sign — sure as death! I been thinkin' a heap 'bout yer Great-grandmaw Kirtley lately, and her fam'bly——"

"Do you remember them all, Maumy?"

"Does I 'member 'em? For de Lawd sake! Do you spose you'se ever gwine to ferget yer Paw or yer Maw or Miss Leigh or little Miss Hope? I wonder, now! Run 'long in with this yere choc'late, an' don't tip the pitcher. Ef you do, it's gwine spill and ruin yer frock. I done fill it up full."

And Caroline went into the drawing-room, wondering if Maumy really were in her dotage.

A few days after Christmas Alison brought an open letter to Leigh.

"Cousin Eliza writes that she will be here the day after New Year," she said. "I am wondering where we had best put her. Perhaps Mayre would move over with Caroline until after the wedding. Sophie could have a cot in Abbie's room upstairs." Sophie was Cousin Eliza's maid.

"I think we can arrange it," Leigh answered, and the line in her forehead deepened.

"Of course Tevis's family will go to the hotel. I must speak with Father about engaging a suite for them immediately."

The days following were so crowded that Leigh and Caroline went to bed too weary to sleep. Alison kept up a round of teas, dinners and dances. The word had gone forth that she was marrying into one of Richmond's wealthiest families, and society paid homage. Mayre was often included in the invitations, but she made excuses when possible.

Mrs. Ravenel reveled in her daughter's popularity. She spent hours in the guest room looking over Alison's lovely things, handling rare bits of lace and convent-embroidered linen, examining imported frocks, bewitching hats, wraps and accessories. The brilliant future that stretched ahead of her handsome daughter repaid her a thousandfold for the loneliness she had endured in her long absence.

"It was a wonderful piece of good fortune — our sending Alison to Cousin Eliza," she said one evening to her husband.

Doctor Ravenel did not reply at once.

"That remains to be seen," he remarked, after the moment's silence. "I sincerely hope so."

"But, Doctor, her marrying into the McElroy

family is a positive guarantee." Mrs. Ravenel was often naive in her deductions.

"There is no guarantee in marriage, Emily, except fidelity — personal obligation — the duty of one individual toward the other. And with so much money ——"

"Surely you do not object to the money?"

"Without it, I should feel greater safety in her future."

Mrs. Ravenel's sigh was lost on her husband. He was too deep in thought.

The arrival of Cousin Eliza was something of an occasion in the family. Mayre's room had been cleaned and refurnished with the best the house afforded. After the day's routine, Leigh had made the pretty, ruffled curtains that hung at the windows, covered the sofa pillows, freshened table covers and bureau scarfs. The effect was all that could be desired.

"We can give Cousin Eliza one thing that she can't get at home," Mayre said, glancing through the window. "That view of the Peak."

She stood for a moment looking out on the old mountain.

Caroline had drawn a mental picture of Cousin Eliza. She expected to see a queenly woman with a beneficent face crowned by snow-white hair.

Her first view of the stranger relative quite stunned her. Cousin Eliza was small; almost

wizened. Her thin little face was pitifully lined, her blue eyes sad and wistful. Her black hair (a very suspicious black) hardened features that nature had intended to be kind. Caroline noticed that at once. She had a positive genius for finding discarded virtues.

But her voice, like the voices of all true Southerners, was deep and rich; it was cordial, too, with a most appealing sincerity. Caroline felt it.

"And this is little Caroline," she said, and kissed her, though they were still on the railway platform, and the habit was not followed in the best society. "And Leigh and Mayre. Emily dear, and Doctor, I am so glad to see you all. This is indeed a pleasure."

The day had scarcely passed before Cousin Eliza was one of the family. She was extremely adaptable: she loved the house, her room — and yes, she thought in time she would love the mountains, but at present they terrified her, they were so enormous.

"Many people feel that way at first," Caroline explained, "but when you get up into the heart of them and see how friendly they are — now generous with their flowers and cañons and waterfalls; when you see the Peak at sunset, with his rainbow shawl over his shoulders ——"

"Why, the child's a poet," Cousin Eliza said,

and gave her another kiss. Caroline returned it warmly.

That evening, when the family were lingering over tea, Caroline beckoned to Cousin Eliza:

"Come up in my tower room," she whispered softly. "Please. I want to show him to you in all his glory — the Peak."

Cousin Eliza curled up on the cushioned seat much as a child would have done. There is an advantage in being small, after all.

Caroline drew up the old desk chair.

"In just a moment," she said; "the fairies are bringing out his robes. I want you to see him at his best, because — well — because he is all we have to give you."

Cousin Eliza's blue eyes filled and overflowed.

When the brilliant sunset colors had faded, Caroline's whisper broke the silence:

"Now you are going to see him at his prayers, Cousin Eliza. Look at his halo — that's the afterglow. How transparent the tints are this evening, the lavenders, blues and rose. This is hush time — when everything stops."

Caroline stopped also — and turned away her head. Hush time brought poignant memories, though she still loved it.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Wedding

THE wedding was to occur on Saturday evening at eight o'clock. Tevis McElroy and his family arrived at noon on Thursday.

"Tevis has never been West," Alison said to Blair. "I hope that you will be good enough to show him something of the country. We shall be very busy these last few days."

Blair graciously accepted the responsibility, and Mrs. Ludlow, always generous, offered her horses and motors.

Caroline, much to her amazement, was asked to accompany Alison to the train.

Her first glimpse of her new brother-in-law was disappointing. He was much smaller than his photograph led one to believe, and he lacked the alertness that Mayre and her mother had commented upon. However, after she had shaken hands with him and looked into his pleasant gray eyes she felt reassured. Looks mattered very little if one had personality, and this Tevis McElroy had.

And she liked his father (Caroline had decided likes and dislikes, and was seldom mistaken) and Alice, a fair, wide-awake girl of nineteen, alive with enthusiasm. Of the mother she was not so sure. She seemed rather haughty and overpowering.

"We are going to take you to the hotel now and let you rest for a few hours (it was then noon) and at four o'clock we shall come for you," Alison said, after she had greeted the family and shaken hands with Tevis. There was not the slightest demonstration between them. Alison might have been greeting Jimmy or Blair, even Punny Matthews, except that her face flushed to a delicate pink, and her eyes (at first Caroline thought they warmed, but she afterward doubted it) reflected pride.

Later in the day she had Tevis to herself for fifteen or twenty minutes. She was rather interested in his conversation, which was exceedingly complimentary, a little too complimentary, she thought, on such short acquaintance, but still — he was soon to be one of the family and she forgave him. It was rather nice, after all, to be told that one was happy to come into such a delightful family, to contemplate a friendship with so attractive a "little sister."

But there was little time for conversation. The house seemed very noisy and upset; the doorbell

rang constantly. Abbie, Sophie and the new maid fluttered about, bringing in parcels, carrying packages upstairs, admitting visitors.

"Seem lak Bed'lum done let loose here," Maumy complained. "Lord save me from any more of these big blo'outs! I'se plum tuckered out."

"Go to bed, and I will clean up the kitchen," Caroline begged.

"Go to bed — to bed! With all them folks a-comin' to dinner to-night. Miss Caroline, you done talk crazy!"

"I reckon I do; I feel sort of loony," Caroline admitted and went to silence the clamoring telephone.

Friday was no better, except that the excitement lifted the household above worn nerves. The presents were arriving. Abbie stood at the front door and gathered them in: express packages, flowers, china and silver — even furniture. Such an array!

Caroline offered to move to the tower and clear her bedroom for the wedding gifts. Mayre arranged the tables and put out the presents.

Maumy shook her head as she viewed them.

"Somepin wrong with this here ole worl'," she grumbled. "Miss Alison, she's marryin' into a family dat's already got more'n it knows what to do with, then along comes all this stuff. But I

reckon hit all evens up in the end. De poor man he gits his ice in the winter an' the rich man in the summer — Good Lord, here comes some more, honey."

"I will call Alison," Mayre said. "She likes to see them first."

"This here package was brung by a messenger boy," Abbie said. "He told me to put it into Miss Alison's own hands."

"And into my own it shall go, Abbie," Alison answered, quietly entering the room.

There was a hushed silence while she unwrapped the parcel, broken only by Maumy's, "De biggest gif's is always in de li'l'st package. I specs it's somepin fine, Miss Alison!"

Alison opened the purple velvet box — a very worn box — frayed a bit at the edges. She gave a little gasp.

"Girls — why — why — it's a strand of pearls. Pearls! The thing I have always coveted. Tevis must have sent it. There seems to be no card with it."

She took the treasure from its ancient bed and ran the beads through her hands.

"They are heirlooms, wherever they came from," she said, laying them against her cheek in a caress. "Oh, the lovely things! Look at them, Maumy. Did you ever see anything so beautiful?"

"You know what they mean, Miss Alison?" the old servant asked. Her tone was ominous.

"No — what do they mean?"

"Tears, honey."

"Oh, Maumy, how dreadful to tell her that," Mayre cried. "Alison's going to have everything in the world."

"Nobody has everything, Missy."

"Well, money can buy most everything," Alison flung impatiently.

"Money don't always buy happiness, lammie, though old Maumy hopes — hopes you have it — you have her prayers and her blessin'."

In after years Alison thought of the remark when she wound the precious heirloom about her lovely throat.

Tevis came in a few minutes later, and Alison, with a flushed and happy face, began to thank him.

"But I didn't send them," he insisted. "Really I did not. Here is my gift, Alison."

He took from his pocket another velvet box. Alison opened it eagerly. A unique diamond ornament lay sparkling in the morning sun.

"Tevis! How dear of you! What is it?"

"Sort of a modernized tiara, I reckon," he said. "You may name it."

Alison slipped down on the old Kirtley sofa, and her face paled.

"Tevis," she said, "it frightens me a little — I feel — as Maumy says — spooky! All during my childhood I wished for a pearl necklace and a diamond tiara and now — here ——"

"I told you the fairies attended your birth; they heard — no doubt."

And since they were alone in the drawing-room and there was no one to see, Alison's fiancé stooped and gave her a kiss.

"But who did send the pearls?" Alison inquired a little later.

"Wasn't there a card?"

"No — we saw none."

"Abbie must have dropped it."

"No — she said a messenger brought the box — there was no card with it."

"Then you dropped it with the wrappings."

This seemed plausible, and a search was immediately begun.

"Maumy took the papers down to the kitchen to burn," Mayre said, after they had looked in every nook and corner. "Perhaps the card was among them."

Tevis hurried to the kitchen. Maumy was putting the last scrap of paper in the range. Every clew was lost.

"It makes me almost ill," Alison said, "and after what Maumy told me about pearls ——"

"For goodness' sake," Caroline exclaimed,

"you aren't going to worry over Maumy's silly superstitions, are you?"

"I suppose I am a little tired and nervous," Alison admitted. "I think I shall rest for a while. I mustn't look worn for my wedding ——"

Immediately the household suggested a darkened room and one of Abbie's fine massages.

Caroline was tired, too, but she found no time to rest.

"I think, since you are the maid of honor, you should also be lying down," Leigh thoughtfully suggested.

There had been some discussion as to the bridesmaids — a church wedding at night meant more or less display. Alison talked the matter over in a businesslike way.

"Of course I must have Tevis's sister and at least one of my own. It would scarcely be suitable to have Leigh ——"

Leigh's thin little form and noticeably curved back rose before Mrs. Ravenel's tender eyes.

"No — dear; Leigh would not consider it for a moment."

"And Mayre is short; she wouldn't measure up with Barbara or Alice. So I suppose it must be Caroline. She will be lovely in a pale yellow gown frilled to the waist. Fortunately she's a Ravenel; they never have an ounce too much

flesh and can wear frills. I suppose we can depend upon her. She seems more reliable ——"

"Caroline still has her own ideas ——"

"Yes, but she is dependable. That is, she wouldn't disgrace us as of old."

"Caroline's good taste is scarcely to be questioned."

"How the child has changed! Tevis thinks her quite a beauty, and Mayre certainly understands dressing her. Yes; I think we shall decide on Caroline as maid of honor."

If Caroline had known that she was selected by elimination rather than by choice, she would never have accepted the honor. As it was, she felt complimented and happy.

The wedding day dawned cold and bright: one of those clear Colorado days when the sun shines in an open sky with belying warmth — Alison's own day — analogous to her nature. There was the same semblance of perfection, the unsuspected chill.

Alison did not rise until late in the afternoon. The family (even Mrs. Ravenel) had begun the day a little after dawn. There was still much to be done: the house straightened for the reception in the evening; belated presents to arrange; forgotten errands, — endless last-minute affairs that take time and patience.

By four o'clock the house had resumed its

normal quiet. Alison's packing was done (the honeymoon was to be spent in California); the wedding gown laid out, the white satin slippers and snowy veil beside it.

Caroline wandered about the house restlessly, haunting the gift room to exclaim over new wonders, then on to the drawing-room to dream for a moment before the wood fire, then up to the tower. Her small feet, still impudent and irresistible, twinkled over the bare floors, the stairs, Maumy's kitchen.

"You ought to be takin' some res' y'self, honey," the old woman said.

"Rest! Maumy! Who could rest on a day like this? I am so excited I can't think."

"Ca'm y'self, lammie. You don't want to make no blunders to-night. You got yo' part all learnt? What you have to do?"

"Of course! The rehearsal went beautifully last night. When the minister says, 'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man——' oh, no, that's Major's part. Mercy! Wouldn't it be awful if I should step up there and begin to take off Alison's glove——"

"I'm tellin' you, honey! You got to be keerful!"

"It is after Alison says I take thee M to be my wedded husband——"

"M? Who's M?" Maumy looked startled.

"That's what it says in the prayer book. She says Tevis, of course. I'm just thinking how it goes. Then Blair gives Tevis the ring, and I take her flowers and slip off her glove ——"

Here the merry feet began an exhilarating patter on the worn linoleum, and Maumy, raising her gingham apron, waved her from the kitchen.

"Go 'long now," she called after her, "an' don't you be thinkin' up no debil'ment to perp-trate on yer sister."

Of course there was no dinner. Who could dine under such circumstances? Leigh carried a tray into the office, and her father ate frugally of chicken sandwiches and cold tongue.

"You must find time to rest, Leigh," he said, shaking his head at her tired face.

"After to-night, Father. I shall stay in bed to-morrow if Maumy can spare me." It was always Maumy — not Mother.

"I insist that you do. Let Caroline help — and Mayre."

"They have both been wonderful."

For two hours before the wedding Alison's door was locked and guarded.

"Let no one come in, Sophie," she demanded, for it had taken the services of both Sophie and Abbie to dress the bride. "I must not get nervous. My face is apt to look like a dairy-

maid's when I am excited. Too much color is such an annoyance — and so plebeian."

But when the family did glimpse the stately form in wedding garb, they stepped back and drew ecstatic "Oh's" of satisfaction.

Alison was perfect from the crown of her filmy veil, that her great-grandmother had worn, to the soles of her exquisitely shod feet.

"Turn around," Caroline demanded. "I want to see the train."

"We can't let the train down now, dear, and don't come quite so closely, please. There — you can see better if you stand a little off. Mother dear, I should like to kiss you, but Abbie has put on the last bit of powder ——"

Caroline's small fists clinched behind her, though she held her tongue valiantly.

"I think it's a shame Tevis can't see you; he won't have half a chance in the church," she said.

"Caroline! Tevis come here — to the house! How dreadful. Think what you are saying."

"Excruciating, isn't it, that the man who's going to be your life partner in a half hour should look at you first in your bridal ——"

Leigh stopped the sentence with a gentle hand.

"How wonderful the pearls look," she said, "and how dreadful we can't find out who sent them."

"Perhaps I really shouldn't wear them ——"

"They might be loaded or something — you know rich people have so many enemies," the maid of honor suggested.

Alison raised her hand to remove them, but she thought better of it; they were very becoming.

"Caroline, your imagination is a positive curse," she declared, turning for a last glance in the mirror.

The reflection must have satisfied her, for she smiled: and it was a beautiful picture — one long to be remembered: a slender figure a little above medium height in a white satin gown with a long square train, her corsage draped with old point lace. A veil, falling from the back of a charming coiffure, was draped in cap fashion over her hair and held with two narrow bands of orange blossoms across her forehead, the lace falling in billows to the end of the long train. The diamond ornament — Tevis' gift — followed the line of orange blossoms, glittering and gleaming above soft waves of hair. In her arms she held her bouquet with its streamers of ribbon and tulle, — lilies of the valley and feathery white orchids.

"I think you are the most beautiful bride I ever saw, and I am going to kiss you whether you like it or not," Caroline said, when she

came out of the spell Alison had cast upon them all.

She leaned over and gave the caress heartily. Abbie instantly covered the spot with powder.

"You are so demonstrative, darling," Alison murmured, but she seemed pleased. The compliment had not failed to reach her, though she disliked demonstrations.

Caroline never could quite recall the church as it looked that night. She had a hazy vision of cathedral candles entwined with flowers and ferns that formed an aisle for the bridal party; an altar abloom with white chrysanthemums and lighted by many tapers in high, branching candlesticks.

It was the low, enchanting music that went with her down through the weeks and months that followed; the entrancing call of the wedding march. She remembered lifting her feet slowly, rhythmically, or she tried to lift them rhythmically; the time was so peculiarly marked that she felt she was dragging them. And she recalled watching the procession; she had met Blair at the chancel and turned so that the view was sweeping, though she knew that it would have been more maidenly to drop her eyes.

But the Major fascinated her. He was so tall and soldierly in his evening clothes. Alison clung to his arm so confidently. Caroline thought

that her hand must have trembled, for once he looked down at her — oh, so tenderly it brought the tears smarting to her own eyes — and drew Alison's arm a little closer within the bend of his own.

And then, when she met Tevis, another look had come into his eyes — the Major's — an appealing look that said, "Take care of her."

Caroline had liked the reassuring smile that flashed for a moment from Tevis' gray eyes; they promised.

It was only Alison who seemed cold and hard and bright — triumphant.

And then Caroline missed the bridesmaids in their charming frocks. She was miles away — delving back into her childhood — her little-girl days.

Something in Alison's expression brought a wave of memories: a day in the tower room — those old letters. Why should she think of them now? She had lived to laugh over them. She could scarcely blame Alison, except for lack of honor.

And then she caught sight of Leigh's pathetic, strained little face in the family pew — her eyes glistening with tears. And her mother was lifting her handkerchief. Why *did* people cry at a wedding?

The procession moved to the inner rail. She

was lost again, the music was so seductive, so dreamy.

She did not realize that she was stopping the ceremony; she had looked away for a moment to the beautiful azure window that memorialized a dead-and-gone parishoner. She had never been close enough before to read the inscription. She bent a trifle closer.

It was the deathlike silence that cut into her consciousness. The clergyman's sonorous voice had stopped.

Blair nudged her. Alison was holding out her flowers. As Caroline's fingers fumbled over the stubborn white glove, she felt ashamed, panicky, though Alison smiled bravely.

It was over at last — the ring on the slender finger. The minister went on, Tevis' low voice repeating after him:

"With this ring I thee wed, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow."

Caroline was paying attention now, watching for the world-old thrill.

"For as much as Tevis and Alison have given and pledged their troth, each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring, I pronounce that they are Man and Wife."

The joyful strains of the march, the pealing church bells reassured her as she passed down

the aisle. Perhaps her momentary abstraction had not been noticed. But Maumy's black look as she passed her in a rear pew told the tale; it had been.

She wanted to run away and hide her face, but an audible whisper, breaking into enthusiastic tones at the entrance held her.

"Wasn't the maid of honor lovely?" a guest was saying. "Really handsomer than the bride, I thought; so much more to her face. And wasn't it cunning the way she forgot to take her sister's flowers? Weddings are so trying. I've yet to see one that went off without a hitch somewhere ——"

Caroline turned and from the ends of her little brown fingers wafted a kiss toward Mrs. Ludlow's crimsoning face.

CHAPTER XIX

Changes

THE weeks following Allison's wedding were long and harrassing to the family. True to prediction, Leigh had a breakdown that lasted well into months.

It was the day after the wedding that she became ill. She and Caroline were packing the wedding gifts when suddenly she sank down on a chair and covered her face with her hands. "I shall have to leave this to you and Mayre, darling," she said in a voice scarcely audible. "Everything seems to be turning black ——"

She did not finish the sentence. Caroline caught her in her strong young arms and carried her across the hall to her own room. She revived her with methods she had watched Leigh apply to others and tucked her in bed before calling the family. It was amazing how Caroline's determination had developed into efficiency. She carried trouble with as high a hand as she had mischief in the old days.

"Don't fuss, please," came Leigh's weak voice

from the depths of snowy pillows. "I will be all right in a few minutes——"

"You will not be all right for months, Sister, and you might as well make up your mind to it."

Doctor Ravenel came at Caroline's summons. His face was anxious as he looked down on the emaciated little form.

"We must have a nurse," he said.

"I shall take care of her," came Caroline's quick response.

"But your school, dear——"

"Mother can sit with her when I am away. Please keep still and be good, Leigh; don't make it hard for us."

And sighing, Leigh turned her face to the wall.

Maumy Rachel was not well either; however, she managed to get about slowly. Mayre helped all she could, but though Mayre was willing, she lacked system and judgment.

Cousin Eliza left the week following the wedding, and with the exodus of the three maids, the house resumed a normal atmosphere.

"Four servants in a house where you can scarcely afford to keep one!" was Caroline's disgusted comment. "I am glad they are gone, and the Lord preserve me from ever having to depend on them when I keep house! Just give me one old darky Maumy and my two strong arms——" The sentence ended in a trilling

laugh. Caroline's spirits were never wholly dampened, no matter how blue things looked.

The night before Cousin Eliza's departure she was closeted for some time in Doctor Ravenel's office. After a roundabout conversation she came to the object of her visit.

"I want Caroline, Cousin Robert," she said, and stopped. The doctor's quick, penetrating look had cut the sentence.

"I am asking a great deal, but I would educate her as a child of her promise should be educated. She is, of course, the flower of your family — intellectually. She will do wonderful things if opportunity is given her."

Doctor Ravenel had looked away, his eyes proud and tender.

"I would send her to the best college in the country and finish her education in Europe—do all that I did for Alison — and more ——"

Something in the face of Caroline's father stopped her.

"I am providing for my daughter's education, thank you, Cousin Eliza. She shall have college training, but not under circumstances of which you speak. The child has been endowed by nature with a fine, wholesome democracy. I don't know what money would do to it. Kill it probably — at any rate take off the edge — dwarf it. With proper direction, Caroline will make this

old world a little better for passing through. Providence has been kind. I would be unworthy of my trust if I defeated it ——"

"I would not spoil her, Cousin Robert. I would put her on a limited allowance ——"

Doctor Ravenel's silvered head shook slowly.

"But don't you think Caroline ought to have a say in the matter, be consulted ——"

There was a moment's silence.

"Perhaps — yes. But not at present."

"Think what it would mean to her, Cousin Robert, — all that I am able to do. And remember — she is a Ravenel ——"

"Exactly." The word burst from his lips with warmth ill-concealed.

"And the Ravenels are all brilliant. They have minds ——"

"Few of them have been hampered with money; its lack is often an asset."

"I would not call the Ravenels poor," she retorted with pride. "They have never made money."

"You infer that — that they marry it?" A smile played on her thin lips.

Doctor Ravenel put out his hand.

"Please do not think me unappreciative," he said, with a smile that dispelled contention. "When you speak of Caroline you touch a chord — that vibrates. I have great dreams for the

child. I must see her over the brink of youth, on the safe side of womanhood."

Eliza Mott's hand met his slowly; though she responded to its pressure, she knew that she could never hope to mould Caroline's future as she had Alison's. At the portal of her character the Major stood guard.

Leigh's illness lengthened into weeks. There were days when she could not stand a footfall across the room, the rattling of a paper, the fluttering of the ruffled curtains at the window. Her shattered, long-suffering nerves had given away.

"Let me have Caroline; she understands," she would whisper, and Caroline would come in softly and lay a cool hand on her forehead, smoothing back the wavy hair; or she would sit quietly within call, longing to be of service.

How she found time to help Maumy, look over her father's neglected books, answer the telephone, to say nothing of keeping up with her junior work in high-school, no one knew. In Leigh's absence she had become the head of the house.

"Beats all how that 'i'l' no-count chile have become the corner-stone of the temple," Maumy Rachel declared. "I 'clare for to goodness I never thought she'd 'mount to nothin'!"

There came a day when Leigh sat up and

noticed Blair's roses in the vase beside the bed.

"They have come every other morning, Sister," Caroline said, and a warm flush stole into the invalid's white cheeks. "Every other morning, rain or shine! Mercy, it's worth being sick to have such devotion!" And Leigh had murmured something about Blair's being a dear.

"He's next to the nicest man I have ever known," Caroline declared.

"And who is the nicest?"

"The Major, of course!"

There were other worries besides illness. It had taken all Doctor Ravenel could collect to settle the wedding expenses.

"Now that we have finally paid the florist and the caterers and dressmakers and servants, I must have a new school dress," Caroline laughed.

"I am afraid Miss Younge will have to make over some of the things Alison left, dear," Leigh said. "The material is very fine, and they are scarcely worn."

"All right," Caroline answered cheerfully, "Nobody here knows them, and if they did, it wouldn't matter. In a family where there are four girls, somebody must wear the hand-me-downs."

Perhaps she would not have been so obliging had not Mayre's skilful designs and Leigh's

equally clever brain revolutionized the discarded things. Caroline wore them with an air. Her companions little guessed at the maneuvering that went on in the family.

"You feel just like you were visiting royalty or something when you go to see the Ravenels," Kathleen once said to her mother. "Mrs. Ravenel is always dressed up, with those darling white lawn things around her throat and wrists, and their table just shines with that old china and silver ——"

"Yes, and Miss Leigh's broke her poor weak back a-puttin' on all that style," Mrs. Briggs retorted. "Mrs. Ravenel don't hurt herself none. I could keep slicked up too if I never went into the kitchen nor felt the heft of a broom in my hand."

"That's so," Kathleen admitted. "But Caroline works a lot. She can hardly ever go anywhere any more."

But Mrs. Ravenel did assume some of the duties during Leigh's illness. She and Caroline had a long conference one night behind a closed door. No one ever knew what passed between them, but it was noticeable that when Caroline left for school the next morning Mrs. Ravenel visited the kitchen and gave orders for the day. Maumy stood with arms akimbo and dropped jaw as she listened.

"Yes'm, yes'm, Miss Em'bly; yes'm, I understands," was all she was able to say.

It was noticeable, too, that Caroline frequently left for school with these words on her lips:

"I am leaving the ordering for you this morning, Mother darling. Please see that Maumy gets the groceries by noon, and I have left full directions for Leigh's medicines. If you are at all puzzled, Major will help you;" or, "I did not have time to get the laundry out last night; please see that it is counted — they are so careless at the Marvel."

Then she would be off, waving kisses until she reached the corner.

There was little time for visiting. Occasionally she managed to spend a half-hour with Madame Wakefield, for the Madame was urgent in her invitations. Once in a while, after Leigh began to curl like a tired child on the old sofa before the drawing-room fire, Alfred would come over with a message

"Madame says that I am to mind Miss Leigh for an hour while you drive with her, Caroline. I say, you're *it* at The Lodge. I used to think I had some show, but now I know jolly well ——" A good-natured laugh left the unfinished sentence to the imagination. Or, "Madame sent over these magazines and books. She said I was to pick out some interesting stuff and read to

your patient. She wants you to shop with her."

Those drives and tours were a delight. Madame so well understood Caroline's pride. She did not load her with useless gifts nor humble her by offering frocks, expensive frocks which Caroline felt free to exclaim over in the shops. Sometimes a box of flowers was sent back to Leigh, or a new book; sometimes it was merely a delicacy to tempt a whimsical appetite. But the Madame never forgot; she had her own ways of paying for Caroline's society.

There was little time for writing during those busy days. The tower had a forsaken air. The desk was cluttered. Newspaper clippings piled high; the dust lay thick on manuscripts.

Sometimes, as of old, she took fifteen minutes to watch the sunset, or scribble a line to The Peak or Mayre's upspringing garden — that was in April — but mostly her daily food was work.

In June she finished her school year with credit, though not brilliantly. Caroline was too versatile to shine; too much of a dreamer to pin herself to drudgery and routine.

"Her mind is too quick for depth," a young teacher remarked to another. "Hers is a superficial cleverness."

"Give the seeds you are planting time to grow," the older woman replied thoughtfully. "The road to success is long and winding; I have seen

the most conscientious student fail to attain what — in time — the quickened spirit reached at a bound. Caroline will never be grooved, steered in the ruts of others' making."

It was true. Caroline would always run counter to conventions. To her, traditions were tiresome treadmills; amenities but kindness. When she looked over the mountains and said that her way lay there, she spoke truly. It wound through straits of rocky experience.

It was an afternoon early in May that Caroline opened her desk in the tower and spent some time over an important letter. Now and then she stopped to watch the robins building their nests in the trees that flourished along the ditch-boxes, or to glance down into the garden where Mayre and Alfred Feveral patiently sewed and weeded.

The letter was finished at last: only a part of it need be recorded:

"Dear Cousin Eliza:

I have been thinking so much about your last words to me at the station: 'If you ever want anything come to me.' I am coming now, to ask you something that will make me happier than anything else in the whole world. I want you to invite Leigh to come to you for a few months' rest. You said that you would be glad to have any of us at any time. Since the wedding she

has been very ill. For a while we almost despaired of her life, but now she is up and around — looking so thin and little. The other day I overheard the Major telling Mother that what she needed most of all was a change of scene and a lower altitude. I know that you would be repaid a thousandfold in having her — she is such an inspiration. I do not like to ask Alison to take her. She is so wrapped up in her new home and friends. And may I trust you not to mention that I have written. The invitation, coming as a surprise, would mean so much."

Two weeks later Leigh was bidding her family good-by with brightened eyes.

"She looks better already," ner mother said, waving her fond adieus. "How kind Eliza is. It was so splendid to think of dear Leigh."

And Caroline, winking back joyful tears, said merely:

"Cousin Eliza has a soul. I felt it the first time we watched a sunset. Now Mother, if you will just keep the reins until vacation. You manage things so wonderfully — and you are looking so well — *and beautiful.* Major said this morning your step was like a girl's."

The words might have sounded patronizing if they had been given with less sincerity. At any rate Mrs. Ravenel did not take offense. She smiled into the speckled eyes that met her own.

CHAPTER XX

Caroline Goes Larking

IT was at noon one warm day in July that Caroline, entering Mayre's room for a book, found her sitting by the west window, regardless of the streaming sun, bathed in tears.

"For goodness' sake, what has happened?" Caroline asked, pausing in the door to make sure that her eyes were not deceiving her. Mayre was so seldom upset. Her poise was a family pride.

"Close the door, and I will tell you. Oh Caroline, the most awful thing has happened. I simply can't stand it — I *won't.*"

"What, do tell me what, Mayre."

"A little while ago the telephone rang. Maumy said it was for me. Muriel Roach was calling. She said that she was giving a fancy-dress dance at the Country Club Saturday night for that cousin she has here visiting from the East and wanted to know if I would come. You know how awfully hard it is to think of an excuse over the telephone, so I said, 'Why, yes, I think I can,' and then she said ——"

Mayre's head went down in her hands again.

"Then she said that she would have Punny Matthews — *Punny Matthews* — call for me at half-past eight."

"Punny!"

"Yes, Punny!"

"Why Punny?"

"Because no one else would go with him, I suppose ——"

"And she made you the — goat ——" Caroline's English sometimes lacked purity, for all she was a Ravenel.

"Yes — just that."

"Well, cheer up! I can imagine a good many worse things than being a goat."

"But that isn't all ——"

"No?"

"She said she was asking Alf for herself. Alf, who has never called on her, and whom she scarcely knows. Imagine!"

"Oh, I see. Alf's the secret sorrow — not poor Punny."

"No — it's Punny. I simply refuse to go with him. You know how the men trade their dances; the girls wouldn't dance with him. I would be the most glorious wallflower that ever bloomed. I am unpopular enough, as it is; now if it were only you ——"

"But I am not out yet, darling. Mother would

expect every dead-and-gone Kirtley in the Warrensburg cemetery to rise from their graves if I went to a party before my life's clock struck eighteen."

"I know ——"

"But you say this is a fancy dress — a masked party?"

"Yes."

Caroline's starlit eyes suddenly became two dusky orbs.

"Mayre — would it be possible—could I—take your place? I am taller, I know, but with low heels and a long cloak. Our voices are exactly alike. People always think I am you over the telephone. I am sure we could not be told apart — masked."

Her tones had taken on a daring note that lifted Mayre's sodden spirits.

"And not tell Mother and Father?" Mayre questioned, coming out of the depths.

"Major wouldn't care — and Mother needn't know for once. Oh, Mayre, let me. It's so larky! I would like to show Muriel Roach a thing or two." A vision of Muriel's tucking a fine pocket handkerchief in a taffeta gown passed before her eyes, but she said nothing. It was rather a small thing to remember, but somehow it had remained through the years, perhaps because Muriel's reputation for fairness was not of the best.

"Would you?" Mayre's tones were almost pleading.

"Would I? Try me."

The next few days were spent in Mayre's room behind a locked door.

"Don't let Maumy find out what we are doing," Caroline cautioned. It was Mayre who designed the costume, of course. Only an artist could have created it. She even insisted upon taking her own spending money to purchase the material, so grateful was she to be freed from the engagement, and her nimble fingers fashioned it. In the absence of Leigh who was still with Cousin Eliza — spending the summer at an Eastern resort and getting stronger every day — Mayre had developed a talent for sewing.

"Oh, it's going to be too dear for words!" Caroline exclaimed, running the soft lustrous sateen through her hands. "I shall not only look, but feel like a daffodil in it!"

A daffodil she was to be. It was marvelous how Mayre, with the two shades of yellow — one deep gold, the other paler — had fashioned a flower. The lovely, upturned petals frilled about Caroline's neck and shoulders; the soft green silk, which Mayre had found in an attic trunk, winding about her slender body, made a perfect stem; the green mask, falling below her flushed cheeks, added mystery and charm.

"If I could only get out of the house without Maumy seeing me," Caroline fretted. "She would know me in a minute."

But at dinner, the night of the dance, Maumy stopped beside Mrs. Ravenel's chair and said:

"Please, Miss Em'bly, if you don't mine, I'se gwine to make a li'l' call to-night. I won't be out late, but I'se got to go."

Caroline held her breath with suspense while her Mother answered:

"Of course, if it is necessary, Rachel."

"What time are you going?" Caroline asked.

"'Bout eight o'clock, I reckon — if I can git off."

"I will dry the dishes for you," Mayre suggested, to Caroline's intense relief.

"This is the night of the party, isn't it, dear?" Mrs. Ravenel inquired with surprise. "You will scarcely have time to help Maumy."

"Oh, the party is not until nine." Mayre answered lightly. "The costume is all ready, you know."

"Let me see you, dear, before you go," her mother said, eyeing her proudly.

And then an unexpected thing happened.

"I have tickets for a musical at the hotel to-night," Doctor Ravenel said to his wife. "I feel like relaxing. This has been a strenuous day. Would you care to go?"

Mrs. Ravenel pleasantly acquiesced. Caroline's breath, again released, was quick and sibilant.

Two hours later Punny, stepping into the drawing-room (the front door had been left wide), was somewhat aghast to see a flower on a long, slender stem suddenly come to life and walk toward him from the piano. When he had recovered his startled senses, he gave a low, complimentary whistle, exclaiming:

"Jove, that's something of a costume, Mayre! But what has it done to you? It's that winding business makes you look so tall, I suppose—gives you height. Well, I guess we'll show folks what's what to-night. Gee, but you're stunning. I suppose you designed it?"

"I helped," Caroline answered beneath the green mask. Her voice was low and ladylike, typically Mayre's.

"Well, it's a stunner all right! Don't think I've ever seen anything just like it. Are we ready to go?"

"Quite."

She went to the foot of the stairs and called casually:

"Good night, Caroline. Don't forget to lock up."

"Good-bye. I hope you have a wonderful time, Mayre," came the enthusiastic answer.

The ride to the club was given to a much more animated conversation than Punny had expected.

"Say, what's changed you so?" he asked, as they neared the brilliantly lighted house set in a thicket of pines. "I never heard you talk before. You were always such a little mouse at school."

Caroline's pretty lips puckered.

"That was several years ago, Punny. I've grown since then. You see, I was just a bud — now I'm blooming!"

"I'll say you are!" Punny admitted. "You've as much punch as that young sister of yours. What is it the old black woman calls her: 'Li'l' Miss No Count.'"

"She hasn't called her that for some time," the daffodil objected. "And please don't call Maumy a black woman. She is only black outside, you know; her soul's white."

"You Southerners set great store by your darkies," Punny remarked, his laugh ringing out on the still air.

"We do when they are our friends," came the quick retort. "Maumy's a Kirtley. She was born in my grandfather's family."

The conversation must have grated, for the daffodil drooped in the softly cushioned seat of the Matthews runabout.

"You're not wilting?" Punny remarked anxi-

ously. "I want you to keep fresh until I deliver you to Muriel."

The veranda was filling up with guests. Caroline ran up the wide steps and into the dressing room. It was crowded with girls of Mayre's age.

She threw off the long coat that had protected her costume from curious eyes and went toward the dressing table to arrange tendrils of wind-blown hair and straighten her mask. A murmur ran through the crowd. "Who is she?" was whispered on every side. "Oh, how lovely! Isn't she graceful, see that willowy walk — like a flower pushed by the wind. My dear, I see *my* finish (this from a rosebud herself); *that's* the belle of the ball!"

And the prophecy was correct. Caroline was scarcely on the floor before her programme was filled, even to the extra numbers. Punny had scarcely a "look-in" (that was what he called it), although Alfred Feveral managed to acquire three dances without effort.

The evening passed in a dream. Caroline never forgot the bliss of her triumphs, even when her "life's clock had struck eighteen" and she was honestly admitted to the realm of social frolics. She danced gaily, gracefully, forgetting the reputation that she was storing up for her decorous

little sister. The mask was her protection. She could be as audacious as she liked.

Only one thing happened to mar the joy of conquest. It was when Alfred Feveral begged her to sit out his dance beneath the sheltering pines. She dreaded what she knew he wanted to say and tried to turn the conversation.

But his heart was too full.

"Mayre," he began, "Mayre, you are so changed — the enthusiasm that I missed in your nature, the joy and happiness — I have found. You are not shy."

"Oh, but I am! Please, let us go in — that music, it's a waltz."

"You are my music."

He had taken her hand but she quickly withdrew it.

"You are so strange, dear, with all your vivacity — so changed ——"

"To-night I am a fairy princess; the wave of a wand and I am gone ——"

"You will never escape me ——"

"Watch me, Sir Knight!"

She had slipped from his side and was bowing low, her laugh rippling on the evening breeze.

Alfred rose and stretched forth a hand, but the daffodil swayed, the wind blew it back to the ballroom.

He stood for a moment watching it — a human-

ized, exquisite thing, floating on the arm of a college man, a tall, well-built fellow, with a healthy tan showing below his mask.

Then he went farther back among the pines and sat for a long time, smoking in silence.

There was another exciting moment on the broad veranda. It was when Jimmy Ludlow, whom she had not dreamed of seeing, since he was supposed to be in the mountains camping, asked suddenly:

"How long does it take a girl to grow up, Mayre? Is she a woman at eighteen — old enough for a — heart affair?"

And the daffodil had straightened her mask, raised it a trifle audaciously, so that her lips were free to smile.

"That depends a little bit, Jimmy — on the girl ——"

"Caroline, for instance," he said boldly.

"Caroline?" There was a second's pause. "Caroline grew up in a night, Jimmy. It's sorrow — and responsibility that ages — not years. Will you excuse me? This dance belongs to Punny — poor Punny! I haven't been a bit nice to him ——"

And another man went into the pines to smoke and meditate.

It was almost twelve o'clock when the daffodil, drooping suddenly, said:

"Punny, I am sorry to ask you to take me home before they unmask, but I have a headache," which was almost true; excitement had brought its penalty. "I really must go ——"

Caroline always liked Punny after his hearty, "Sure, Mike!" It was sympathetic and understanding. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I only — just felt it. You don't mind missing supper ——"

"I hate refreshment dope," Punny declared honestly. "Now, if it was a hot dog ——"

But what did a daffodil know of "hot dogs?" It vanished down the long veranda like mist before the sun.

And Punny, rubbing his eyes, gazed after it in a dream.

"Well I'll be darned if you can tell a blame thing about girls," he said, as he ran a bewildered hand through his high, sleek pompadour. "Not a doggone thing!"

CHAPTER XXI

Maumy Goes Visiting

IF Mayre and Caroline had not been so engrossed in the fancy-dress party, they would have been more surprised at Maumy's wishing to make a call. Maumy's social activities were confined strictly to the Wednesday-night prayer meeting at the Baptist church and an occasional oyster or strawberry "festible."

For some time an idea had been running through Maumy's head, an idea that threatened a mental breakdown unless she found a way to stay her restless "gray matter."

"Look lak I'se gwine plum nutty," she muttered behind the locked door of her bedroom; "plum offen my haid! I got to fine out somepin or I ain't gwine to be woth shucks to my fam'bly."

It took courage to "fine out," but determination is a willing handmaiden.

On the night of the party Maumy dressed for her call with unusual care. Her broad, black hands were scrubbed until they glistened; her face had a corresponding brightness; her bonnet,

tied neatly beneath her chin, rested with dignity on her white, kinky head; her black alpaca dress, just home from the dressmaker, was neat and becoming.

"Reckon I'se good enough to see quality," she said, as she took a last look in the mirror that hung above her bureau. "Reckon I'll 'scape the ragpickers and git past a crowd." She chuckled as she turned out her light and locked the door.

Down the street she wended her way, turning at the corner to enter the side gate of The Lodge.

"Please, ma'am, could I see yo'r Madame," she said to the maid who answered her knock at the back door.

The maid was a little haughty as she answered, "I will see," and left her standing outside on the kitchen porch.

"Tell her it's Miz Ravenel's cullod Rachel," Maumy called after the retreating figure. "I'se right sure she's gwine see me."

The girl was more condescending when she returned. "Madame is in her upstairs sitting room. She will see you there."

Maumy puffed along up the stairs after the light-footed girl, pausing on the landing a bit uncertainly.

"In here, Maumy," a cordial voice called, and the next moment Rachel was standing before the sofa where Madame was reclining.

"Don't git up please, Miss Car'line ——"

The words slipped out so naturally that Maumy put her hand over her mouth to stifle them. *"Madame,"* she corrected.

With her own hands Madame Wakefield pulled forth a chair.

"Sit here, Maumy," she said kindly. "You wanted to talk with me?"

Maumy sat as close to the edge of the chair as comfort permitted.

"Yes'm. Yes'm, I does."

She leaned a little closer, her soft black eyes straining in the Madame's direction, her ample breast rising and falling with each quick breath.

The room was still, the ticking of a clock on the mantel above them the only sound that marred the silence.

Maumy reached forth a trembling hand and laid it on Madame Wakefield's knee.

"Honey," she said, her voice swept with emotion, "honey, I ain't mistaken, is I; my ole eyes ain't playin' me tricks?"

She stopped. Madame's face was strangely tender.

"You is — Miss Car'line Kirtley — ain't you — the little gal what I used to fetch and carry fer down on the old plantation in Virginny? You reccomember my mammy's ole place down in the west field, don't you? — The li'l' house your Paw

built fer her and us pickaninnies after the Jacksons done sent her ole man farther South. You 'member, don't you, Missy? *You ain't forgot?*"

The silence deepened. In Madame Wakefield's eyes tears gleamed. She leaned forward and laid a hand on Maumy Rachel's trembling black one.

"You is, ain't you, honey? You wouldn't fool ole Maumy? I ain't gwine to tell nobody if you don't want me to — not even Miss Em'bly ner the doctor. Maumy's kep' Kirtley secrets 'fore this. Maybe you don't reccomember how your brother Marse Gilbert run away an' come home from the war that time — po' lad — jes' seventeen and scart to def of them bullies up North. Reckon you don't 'member how we hid him in de ole cave out pas' de cornfield. Reckon you don't 'member how we toted milk, and corn bread, and now an' den a turkey laig, er a chicken bone. Reckon you ——"

She paused for a second, her eyes still fixed on the blue ones opposite. Then she went on:

"Reckon you ain't fergot young Massa Henry Chenault that done try to kill his fool self the night you married that young Englishman ——"

Madame Wakefield raised a hand that also shook.

"Maumy, please," she said.

"And the time little Miss Betty Lee done took the scarlet fever and died. Maumy ain't fergot

how you cried — same as my little Miss Car'line did, when the good Gord done took her little sister."

They were both weeping softly now. Madame Wakefield leaned back against the pillows and covered her eyes with her hand.

"An' yer Paw, Miss Car'line. Lordy, I can see him now, so fine and gran' in his uniform that day he march away. Can't you, Miss Car'line? The steel of his ole gun a-flashin' in the sun, his yaller belt buckles a-keepin' company. An' I can see yer Maw a-standin' in the doorway, wavin' him off, holdin' out yer li'l' hands with their sticky kisses. You always a great one fer sweets, Miss Car'line.

"An' the old Kirtley house, where my li'l' white kiddies war brung up. You rec'lec' that — same ole place with its big yard a-stretchin' to the hills —same flowers a-bloomin'—'stershums an' sweet Williams an' 'dendrons — yellow Harrison roses an' sweetbrier. You ain't fergot the ole Baltimore Belle that wrap itself round the front gallery posts, is you? Miss Mayre, she done got a slip of it from down there, Mrs. Boland sent it — you ain't fergot ole Colonel Boland, nuther, I reckon—and it's done fine— fine. And the lilacs! Lordy, them lilacs we had! Lavender and white, smellin' the whole place up with their sweetness. Ain't no lilacs here like'm, no, siree! Po' things

never git a chance to poke their noses through de frost and snow that whirl down from the ole Peak yander ——" she pointed with a jerky gesture through the window. "No, ma'am, he done set gainst lilacs. An' I wonder if y'all reccomembers the li'l' willow twig you and me planted one day out by the barn. It done grew to a big tree — a big tree!"

Madame Wakefield was not weeping now. She was not even listening. Her eyes were dreamy, reminiscent; a tender smile played about her pleasant mouth.

Maumy relapsed into silence. It was the Madame who finally broke it.

"How did you know — Maumy — know that I was Caroline Kirtley?"

"I reckon first it was somepin li'l' Miss said the time she first seen you. She war tellin' the fam'bly 'bout you at the dinner table. She's a smart li'l' thing, Miss Car'line is; them speckled eyes of hers don't miss nothin'. Lord, Miss Car'line, you ought to seen her when she was little — beatenest chile to run away an' sass back an' act up. But I was tellin' you, yes'm — li'l' Miss she come home an' say the lady over here had big round eyes — *Kirtley eyes* — an she said they laugh wif you, not at you. An' it made me think of you; my, how y'all used to laugh when you was little! Seem lak you was born to smile.

"An' then the time y'all come over an' Miss Alison she went on 'bout that ole lady she thought was her Great-aunt. You must 'scuse Miss Alison fer that, Miss Car'line. She done mean no harm. The girls they done a heap a talkin' 'bout their Great-aunt when they was li'l' things jes' babies — they didn't never spect nothin' from her. It was all a joke."

"Of course, I quite understand."

"I hope you do. *The Ravenels, they don't ax nothin' of nobody!* The Ravenels is just as good most as the Kirtleys." Maumy's head went up with a jerk.

"Most, Rachel?" The smiling mouth dimpled.

"Well, ma'am, don't seem lak nobody could quite tetch a Kirtley, but the Ravenels is pow'ful fine, pow'ful fine!"

Again there was silence. This time Maumy spoke.

"Miss Car'line, I want to ax you something. I hope you won't take no 'fense. It was you who sent the pearls to Miss Alison, wasn't it? You don't need to answer, I can see by your face."

"Miss Alison didn't know?"

"No'm, no'm; she ain't never suspec'."

"They belonged in the Kirtley family, Maumy. It was only right that they should come back to it. I am too old for pearls. They were my mother's."

"Yes'm. Seems lak I almost reccomember."

"And Miss Alison wanted pearls — from Great-aunt Caroline."

"Yes'm, yes'm. Ain't you never going to tell her, Miss Car'line?"

"I think not. Why should I? It is quite as pleasant to be a friend to the Ravenels as a relative."

"Oh, no, Miss Car'line; blood is thicker'n water!"

"Perhaps, but I shall ask you to keep my secret a while longer."

"Did you know when you come here, Miss Car'line — know my people was right 'cross the street?"

"No — not until the day Miss Caroline tried to save little Ivan. I knew then. She is a dear child."

"Miss Car'line? Yes'm, but uppidy. Ter'ble uppidy sometime. You don't never know 'bout her. And caution! Lordy, Miss Car'line ain't got no more caution than a goose. Her Paw was plum scared to def the day she dove after the dog. He turn pale as a corpse when she tole him. Miss Car'line, she's the core of his heart, the very core, yes'm. An' I'se boun' to say she's improvin'. Seem lak when she done git her growth and her woman sense, she's gwine lead 'em all."

"I agree with you, Maumy."

"But they's all fine, all my chillun."

"Of course they are."

"You cain't hep havin' yer favorites."

"And yours?"

Maumy lowered her voice.

"I reckon I'se with the Major, if the truf was known. I set a heap by Li'l' Miss; it's always de bad ones dat's got de spunk to do things. Miss Car'line, she'll go further than all the rest put together——"

Maumy paused in the narration to laugh until her fat sides shook.

"When Miss Car'line was little, seem lak she done had a debil. I nearly bus' laffin' sometimes, when I think of her tricks, but it wern't no joke then, no, ma'am. I reccomember once when she was a little girl they let her sing in the church choir; they have 'em in the 'Piscopal church, li'l' boys and girls, and one 'Pifney Sunday they was all gwine carry candles up the aisle."

Maumy paused to laugh.

"An' at the las' minute Miss Nancy Thurston,—y'all reccomembers the Thurstons — Miss Car'line's Sunday-school teacher, she say to Miss Em'bly she 'fred to trus' Miss Car'line to walk up the aisle; she 'fred she bust out somewhere ——"

Madame too was laughing softly.

"So Miss Em'bly, she took Miss Car'line in the pew with her, an' while they was all a-singin', and Miss Em'bly busy with her hymn book, all of sudden they was a combustion and a titter run through the congregation, and Miss Em'bly she look up, and here Miss Car'line, she done wiggled herself pas' her Maw, and got on the end of the seat, and ever' time a candle done pass her, she up and blew hit out; yes'm, she done got 'em all black as tar when Miss Em'bly she jerk her back and sneak her out the side door. Oh, Lordy, seem lak I never kin ferget that day. Miss Em'bly, she come nearer being mad than we ever seen her, but the doctor ——"

"What did the doctor do?"

"I reckon he done whup Miss Car'line, but hit took him three days to git his face straight 'nough to do it; yes'm, the doctor he got more humor than Miss Em'bly. Seem lak he can relish a joke better."

There were other reminiscences of Caroline, and of Leigh and little Hope. When Maumy finished, the silver tones of the ornamental clock were chiming ten.

"Reckon I'se taken up too much of your time, Miss Car'line," Maumy apologized, "but I'se relieved — pow'ful relieved. I'd a been plum sick if I hadn't come over here to-night. An' I'se mighty glad to see you again in the flesh. Many

time I'se said howdy, fer old time's sake, to yer picture in the hall. Yes'm."

"And you will not speak of your discovery, Maumy; you will let me take my own time to inform my relatives?"

The look in Maumy's honest face rebuked the Madame.

"I beg your pardon, Rachel," she said humbly. "Of course I may trust you. Good night. Come to see me again. I want to know more of Warrensburg and the old families."

And the Madame, instead of ringing for the light-footed maid, traveled the length of the long hall and down the stairs to let Maumy out the side door.

CHAPTER XXII

Alf Makes a Discovery

IT was in October that Leigh arrived home, looking as fresh and dainty as a wild rose.

In New York Cousin Eliza had found a specialist who, by a series of exercises, alternated by absolute rest, had performed a miracle with Leigh's back. It would never be absolutely straight, but it was gradually mending, and her step was almost as light as that of her sisters.

"You are not going to work yourself down again," was Caroline's injunction, beholding the change with delight. "It isn't necessary. Mother is a perfect dear about managing, and anyway, the cares are much lighter than they used to be."

Leigh promised to be careful. She had brought from the South a young negro girl to assist Maumy in the kitchen, so that Maumy also might be freed from overtiring burdens. Altogether, the household cares seemed to have been reduced.

Leigh brought news of Alison's beautiful home which was just being completed, of her social conquests, her friends and neighbors.

"How long did you stay with her?" Caroline asked.

"Oh, only a day or so, dear; you see, she was very busy and she had so many duties; besides, I went to visit Cousin Eliza."

Caroline made no comment; Leigh's flushed face revealed more than words. Alison had been too occupied with society to give her much attention.

"I don't see how she could bear you out of her sight," Caroline said, watching the color ebb from her sister's face. "You were so good to her when she was little. I remember how you used to dress her dolls and make her clothes and run after her with the whisk broom and mend her things and ——"

"That was my pleasure, darling. Alison always graced her frocks, and she loved my dolly clothes."

Caroline's disgruntled "Humph!" echoed down the hall as she went to her own room. Caroline's "Humphs!" were often eloquent.

It was about this time, her senior year in high-school, that a new phase of her character developed. She became tremendously interested in her father's poor (they were legion), and her free hours were spent in visiting hovels, hospitals and sanitariums.

"The dear child is exposing herself to all sorts

of disease," Mrs. Ravenel complained, but the doctor laughed.

"Caroline has had everything but smallpox and hydrophobia, and since she carries several vaccination scars and the meanest dog on earth wouldn't bite her, I am not worrying."

She appeared at Madame Wakefield's one day, looking very serious. "Is Alf at home?" she inquired.

"I think so — yes."

"May I see him, please?"

He had scarcely entered the room when she said, "Alf, I want a suit of your clothes, good ones, and an overcoat if you can spare it, and a pair of stout shoes."

"I say, Caroline, that's a ripping order. What's happened?"

"An accident — to a young fellow the Major has been looking after. He fell from a bridge — a high one — and twisted his back, poor chap. He's been in the hospital nearly six months, but he's better now, and he wants to get home — somewhere in Illinois, I believe, and ——"

"Would you come upstairs with us, Madame?" Alf inquired. "Perhaps Caroline would like to select the material. Suppose you won't object to an English tailor?"

"Not in the least; anything goes, so that it's neat and whole. My young man is pretty much

of a gentleman if he was stealing a ride on a freight train ——"

"Oh, I see ——"

"No, you don't. You would have to know the particulars."

"Wouldn't mind telling us — since I'm to outfit him?"

"You'd be interested."

They had reached the second landing. Madame was puffing and wheezing. Caroline slipped an arm through hers, and together they walked the length of the wide hall.

Alf's quarters were toward the west, a large square room in perfect order. Caroline gazed about in surprise. "I didn't know men were so neat," she remarked. "You see, we are all girls in our family; we don't know anything about boys."

Alf found them seats and turned to his closet. In a moment he had all the available chairs piled with a man's wearing apparel.

Caroline seemed appalled.

"Oh, Alf, I really didn't mean your best things — just something half-worn — and suitable ——"

"I haven't anything else ——"

Caroline pointed to a tweed suit that had seen wear but was still in good condition.

"That would be fine, and the brown overcoat —

oh, you are kind — it looks so warm and woolly. Could I really have it? Barnes will be stunning in it; he's such a big, well-built fellow. That's why I came to you ——"

Alf made his best dancing-school bow.

"And he's so plucky. I'll tell you all about him ——"

She did, and Alf contributed another suit.

Madame left them at the door of the upstairs living room. Caroline sat down in front of the mantel and gazed for a while at the portrait that always fascinated her. She was perfectly at home. She often sat there with Alf and drank in his stories of England, his young sisters, his cousins. She loved to hear about them — of the vast estates — especially the Madame's.

"You must visit us sometime," he once said, and her heart gave a great bound. To go to England: to see an English garden — English homes — English customs! To write about them — letters, of course — to the family, Kathleen — Jimmy!

"It would be wonderful," she sighed, "but impossible. In the first place Madame may never ask me, and in the second, I doubt if we could ever scrape up enough money for such a long trip." She was always charmingly frank in regard to the family finances. It was quite enough to be a Kirtley, without having money.

"The Madame will ask you ——"

For some reason Alf stopped there and a bit of color came into his clear English cheek.

"Do you think she would?"

But Alf had adroitly called her attention to some photographs and she forgot the joy of contemplation.

To-day, as she sat looking up at Charles Feveral, her eyes were half-closed and dreamy.

"I wonder if I shall ever meet him," she said presently.

"Shouldn't wonder."

"When I make that visit to England? When somebody touches me with a fairy wand and transports me hither ——"

Her low, bubbling laugh filled the room.

Alf came nearer and drew up a chair facing her.

"Do that again," he said.

"Do what?"

"Laugh."

"Oh, mercy, Alf, one can't laugh at nothing."

"Tell me again about the fairies."

His face was warm and eager. Her own flushed with a memory. It had come. She knew that it would. It was not the first time she had caught Alf watching her since the fancy-dress party. She had felt the same searching scrutiny when he sat with Mayre, a baffled, disappointed look

that she alone could interpret. She knew — understood. And his friendship with Mayre had become a little more desultory. They had talked garden until the subject was threadbare. And Mayre no longer went about the house singing her crooked little tunes. Sometimes she was wan and wistful, again bright and hopeful.

Caroline loathed her part in the change, regretted a thousand times her impulsiveness. She almost came to the conclusion that she wanted to be like Alison: cold and calculating and conventional. It brought less misery after all; impulsive people were always settling old scores, clearing up past misunderstandings.

Alf spoke suddenly. He had been watching her face.

"You put one over on me jolly well that — that night out at the club," he said, with his straight-to-the-point English manner.

Caroline's lips were dumb.

"Didn't you?"

Still silence.

"I say — didn't you?"

"Did I?"

The color had leaped in Alf's face. He looked a bit sheepish.

"When did you find it out?" Caroline at last asked.

"Just now."

Again the low laugh filled the room.

"What's the joke?"

"You! You're so British, Alf, I can't help laughing. It took you — let me see ——" She began to count on her slim brown fingers, "one, two, three, four — four months to see it."

"See what?"

"The joke. That's English, isn't it?"

"I believe we have a reputation for slowness in some matters — but not in others." His face was so serious that Caroline jumped up quickly.

"Goodness, I hope I haven't offended you," she said.

"You couldn't, you little witch."

"Not a fairy then?" She was still laughing; her white teeth, gleaming between arched red lips, gave her a daring, irresistible charm.

He tried to take her hand, but she eluded him by picking up the suits.

"You are not going to carry those things over," he said, taking them from her ——

"Certainly I am."

"Certainly you are not. James will deliver them. Where do they go?"

"Across the street — number 5075 Cascade ——"

"Your house?"

"The Major's."

"I see."

"Do you really! You do see sometimes ——"

"Yes — my eyes are full now."

He was looking straight into the speckled ones.

"Do you like coffee grounds?" she asked saucily.

"I — adore them."

"You are kind — good-by. Thanks awfully for the suits. Barnes is going to look like a king; perhaps I will bring him over to thank you."

"Don't."

"Why ——"

"I don't want the poor chap appearing in my cast-offs — thanking me — it would hurt him."

"So it would; you are thoughtful, Alf."

"Am I? I think I am a stupid fool."

"Because you couldn't see a silly joke?"

"Because ——"

He did not finish. "If — if your man wants anything else, let me know, please."

"There is one thing, but I hate to ask it — you have been so kind ——"

"What is it — I offer you half my kingdom ——"

"For Barnes?" Her charming, tip-tilted face lifted to his, her red lips flashed a bantering smile. She went on hurriedly, "I am trying to beg enough money from people who wouldn't miss it to buy his railroad ticket. He is so anxious to get home to see his mother before

she goes — I told you how ill she has been for years ——"

Alf reached into his pocket and drew forth some bills.

"No — no, please. I couldn't let you do it all. I have saved quite a bit out of my allowance, and the Major insisted upon contributing."

"Caroline, you make me feel ashamed."

"Pray why?"

"You are so — good."

"You don't know me. Ask Maumy. She will disillusion you — tell you I was the *baddest* ——"

Madame's appearance stopped the information.

"Did I hear you say that you wanted money for this poor boy, Caroline?"

"Yes, Madame, but I have quite enough."

"He will want something in his pocket."

"It would be wonderful."

She took the bill that Madame brought and thanked her prettily. She had gone a few steps when she came back.

"May I kiss you for it," she asked, "on your cheek? I've always wanted to — somehow ——"

Just what brought the sudden rush of tears to the round blue eyes Caroline could not imagine, but when the Madame held out her arms she cuddled into them.

And on that same Indian summer afternoon,

Blair Newland looked into Leigh's brightened eyes and pressed his suit. The warm, sunny veranda was quite deserted save for the two. Leigh's fingers were busy with her lace and linen; there was still lace to whip and initials to embroider, if the family had become independent of her services.

"Now that you are well — or nearly so ——"

"I will never be wholly well, Blair dear; you must not deceive yourself."

Blair's tender eyes caressed the sweet face before him.

"I loved you when you were less strong," he said patiently.

"Yes — but we must wait a while yet, Blair — perhaps some day — some day I shall really be well enough to make a home for you — but not yet. It would be unfair ——"

And with that slender promise he was encouraged and content.

As the winter went on, Caroline took refuge more and more in the tower room. Here she wrote her school themes, studied, dreamed plots of stories and dramas. Now and then one of her poems, unsigned, found its way into the *Green and Gold,* the high-school paper, and a story appeared in a local magazine, but her hopes still outweighed experience; the way to fame was long and steep. Perhaps her greatest gift lay

in realizing it. She was absolutely devoid of egotism. Praise had the effect of humbling her. She doubted her own ability with a zeal that fostered it; she wanted to prove its worth to herself, — and in proving she grew.

The Major watched her development with eager eyes. "If I am spared one year more," he said when she was sixteen, and then, "one more year," when she was seventeen; but now that she was approaching eighteen, he sparred for greater length of time.

It was one morning in the early spring that Caroline, keeping office — she always took the office on Saturday — grew impatient with a poor sodden piece of humanity that clung to her father for spiritual and physical support.

"What do you bother with old Kline for, Major?" she said. "He came this morning in a wretched condition, and I told him to go away."

"That was a little out of your province, Caroline."

"Oh, he'll come back, don't fear; but I can't understand why you keep on with him, giving him money when we need it ourselves."

She never forgot the look that gathered in her father's eyes as he answered:

"My child, there is a turning point in the life of every human soul. Who are you — or who am I — to say when that moment shall come?"

Who, indeed. The next time Kline appeared at the door she welcomed him graciously. Many years later her father's loyalty and old Kline's turning came back to her with sudden force.

CHAPTER XXIII

Caroline Decides

IT was April. One of those blue and gold days that Colorado occasionally shows as a sample of what real weather ought to be. The sky was turquoise; the sun, at mid-afternoon, bright and warm; the air so thin that it almost seemed one could reach out and lay a caressing hand on the old Peak.

"Look at him now, Maumy," Caroline said; they were in the drawing-room busy with the spring house-cleaning. Maumy's head was bound in a red and yellow handkerchief; now and then a white, kinky braid escaped its confines, to be poked back by Caroline's mischievous fingers. Maumy's bristling pigtails had always been a source of merriment to her.

"I ain't got no time to be sky-gazin'," Maumy said impatiently. "Look wh'all coming crost the street."

Caroline ran to the French door.

"Why, it's Madame," she cried. "How slowly she walks. Oh, dear, I am afraid her rheumatism

is bad again. We have had so much rain this spring."

"Miss Car — de Madame ain't so spry as she uster waz," Maumy said .

Caroline turned a surprised face.

"What did you start to call her, Maumy?"

"Hungh?"

"You said Miss Car ——"

"Sure I did. I say, Miss Car' line, de Madame ain't so spry as she used to waz." Maumy's low chuckle was cunning.

"Oh."

"You ain't changed your name yit, is you?"

"I should hope not. Why — Why she's going round to the office. I do believe she's going to consult the Major. Well, if she had gone sooner, she would be well now."

"I reckon so, honey."

"We must watch when she comes out and give her some tea."

"I ain't gwine serve no tea house-cleanin' time."

"I will — you needn't bother."

"Where y'gwine set her?"

"On the veranda."

"They's a cold wind thar—your ole man he looks pow'ful meek, but his bref's icy ——"

Caroline shook her head at the Peak. "Maumy distrusts your smiles," she said and laughed.

Doctor Ravenel seemed rather surprised upon entering his reception room to see Madame Wakefield seated in his one easy chair. He came toward her cordially.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Madame. You wish to see me?"

"Yes — alone, please."

Wonderingly the doctor led her to the inner room. When she was comfortably seated facing him, he said:

"You are not well?"

"Perfectly. I have not called professionally, Doctor Ravenel. May I have an hour of your time, nevertheless? I think it will take quite all of that — to enlighten you as — to who I am."

"As to who you are, my dear Madame ——"

"Yes."

The doctor's puzzled face hastened her information.

"Let us come to the point at once. I, Doctor Ravenel, am Caroline Kirtley Wakefield, the aunt of your wife, Emily Kirtley. I married at eighteen, left Warrensburg — but that is a long story — perhaps you do not care for details. Pardon me, I have alarmed you. I am always brusque — England taught me that ——"

Doctor Ravenel was leaning back in his chair, his amazed eyes leveled in his guest's direction.

"I should have been more considerate in my

announcement but — what is the difference? You will understand presently. Why waste words?"

"You are Caroline Kirtley — my children's great-aunt?"

Madame Wakefield thought she discovered a flush traveling upward from his neck to his gray hair.

She laughed.

"Please don't mind their silly conversations regarding me. It was most natural, I assure you. I have never given it a moment's thought."

They both laughed, and the doctor put out his hand.

"Let me welcome you into the family," he said cordially.

"Thank you — but for the present, I prefer to remain — Madame Wakefield."

It is scarcely necessary to record the visit that followed, the history of Madame's two marriages, the first to Sir Sydney Wentworth in her early youth, the second, long after his death, to Colonel Ainsdel Wakefield; of her travels over the globe, resulting, most naturally, in a visit to Colorado. Her nephew, Alfred Feveral, nephew by marriage — she had never borne children of her own — wanted to see The Lodge, a gift to him from his elder brother who had an unfortunate experience there. So the history ran.

It was when she came to the real object of her visit that the doctor straightened in his chair, and his face grew a little ashen.

"As I said before, Doctor Ravenel, I am a brusque person. I do not mince matters." Her words, quickly staccato, bore evidence. "I get to the point as speedily as possible. Your fourth daughter, Caroline, has attracted me greatly. She is also, I fancy, my name-sake. I have no children of my own, as I have just said. I therefore ——"

Doctor Ravenel raised a trembling hand as if to ward off a blow, but the Madame continued.

"I therefore wish to make provision for her in my will. I am an old woman, Doctor Ravenel, old in years. I shall soon have reached my four-score; asthma is a poor bedfellow, though your wonderful climate has benefited me ——"

She paused for a minute. The doctor had leaned back in his chair. His gaze was directed through the window. For once his eyes had lost their inscrutability. They were no longer unfathomable. They were soft and tender. In their depths lay the responsibility of parenthood.

Madame Wakefield saw that she had startled him and for a moment she was silent. Presently she went on:

"If it were possible, and you would allow me, I should like to take Caroline home with me in

the autumn — to England. There she could have many advantages — educational — social. Success awaits her, I am sure, and with means at her command ——"

It was then Doctor Ravenel spoke, almost sharply:

"Success, Madame Wakefield, is not a windfall; it is a habit!"

"You mean ——" Madame Wakefield began and stopped. The doctor's eyes were again inscrutable: the ghosts that passed before them were not for the world,—defeat, humiliation, disappointment. He had failed with one child. Alison's selfishness continually rebuked him. Yes, he had failed there, flagrantly.

The face that he turned to Madame Wakefield was almost haggard. She was touched.

"I know that I am asking for your very life, Doctor ——"

"It is not that. I am accustomed to sacrifices." Unconsciously a cough rose to his lips. Colorado had fought valiantly, but could never entirely heal his damaged lungs. He knew that. There would always be a struggle.

"It is not the sacrifice. That I would make willingly. I shall have to think over your offer, Madame Wakefield, but — if I refuse it, I must ask you not to doubt my gratitude. We must not — fail — Caroline."

She did not question what he meant. Caroline Kirtley was too fine to trespass.

"I shall trust your wisdom in the matter, but in regard to my will — time waits for no man, Doctor. I know not when my hour may come. I want to make Caroline my heir."

Doctor Ravenel rose with her.

"Under no circumstances would I wish Caroline to inherit a fortune until she has reached the age of thirty. By then, if ever, habit will have insured success. I thank you — more perhaps than I have been able to express."

It was after dinner, that night, that Caroline was invited into the office. Her father, as always, drew up a chair for her. His cigar was well alight when he said:

"To-morrow, I believe, is your eighteenth birthday."

"So it is, Major. I had almost forgotten."

"Do you realize that you will be of age?"

"No; will I really? How interesting!"

"Have you thought what you want to do — in the future? Nowadays girls, as well as boys, work toward a definite result."

"Mercy, you are not going to turn me out, are you, Major?" She reached and slipped a hand into his.

"I should always want you with me, Caroline," he said softly. "I must watch lest I become sel-

fish. No — I merely want to help you find yourself, to know that great big world out there — called life."

"But goodness, Major, is it so serious as that!"

"To-morrow you cross a line, my child, into womanhood. There are obligations."

"I must stop playing."

"There will always be time for play."

"But I must lay plans for the future. Is that it?"

"It is none too soon to begin."

"I think I should like to write, Major."

"Very well; that means education."

Caroline's brown head bobbed.

"I — if it were possible, I should like to go to a good college — where I could get the best English. But most of all I want to live — to understand people — their hurts and cares and ambitions — to get inside of them. Perhaps you don't quite understand — down under the skin and work out."

She laughed her low, bubbling laugh.

"Yes — I understand. What kind of people?"

"Oh, all kinds. They don't differ much. What's that couplet?

'When you get to a man in the case,
They're like as a row of pins -
For the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady
Are sisters under their skins.'

Take Maumy, for instance. Did you ever know a finer lady — down under the skin? Look at her loyalty, her modesty, her fairness and decency."

She broke off suddenly:

"Oh, Major, I hate growing up!"

"We have all hated it, I suspect, Caroline."

"Why must we?"

The doctor smiled.

"I am afraid if old people could keep their looks — their sparkle — along with the experience age contributes, poor youth would have no show at all."

"I had never thought of that. Gracious, there's so much to learn!"

"So much, indeed."

Silence fell between them. The doctor puffed at his cigar; Caroline caught the rings.

"I suppose I will have to stop this," she said, and her red lips pouted, "now that I am crossing the Rubicon."

Her father did not speak.

"Is that all you wanted, Major? If it is ——"

Suddenly he leaned forward in his chair. He was under a great strain. Caroline felt it.

"How would you like to go abroad?" he asked abruptly.

"Abroad!" She bounded from her chair.

"Yes — to England!"

"With the Madame?"

"Yes."

For a moment the atmosphere was strangely tense.

"To London, Major?"

"I suppose so."

"Oh, I would simply adore it. Could I?"

"I want you to think it over."

"You mean — decide? She's really asked me?"

For a moment he did not answer; it almost seemed that he could not. Then he nodded gravely.

"Oh, Major, it sounds like — like 'such a big order', as Alf says. I am afraid I can't decide alone. You must help me. When would she want me to go?"

"Next autumn, I believe."

Again there was an ecstatic "Oh."

Her father rose.

"To-morrow morning, early — before office hours — I want you to come in here and tell me your decision. Good night."

She was dismissed, but something in the Major's face made her yearn to linger. He looked old and careworn. There were lines about his eyes that she had never noticed before. His step was weary.

It was a tedious night for both. Doctor Rav-

enel lay on his cot in the tent, looking out upon the stars.

Caroline tumbled and tossed. When she slept it was to dream wild, thrilling dreams. Toward morning a strange peace fell upon her. She crept from her bed and threw a dressing gown about her. To the East the sky warmed with color. She watched it until the last tone ebbed. Still she sat gazing eastward.

At nine o'clock she presented herself at the office. As always, the Major had dressed with care. She noticed his hands — the well-kept nails — the top of his snowy handkerchief showing above his coat pocket. There was an air about him. A thrill of pride shot through her.

"I have decided, Major," she said, and her voice trembled a little. "Could we sit here a minute, please?"

The Major pulled up chairs.

"I am very grateful to the Madame, but — but I shall not accept her invitation," she said quietly. Her voice was low.

A light leaped to the tired eyes opposite.

"I feel — you see — may I speak frankly, Major? I don't just know what it would do to me — now — while I am so young. There was Alison, you know. Leigh says it is so easy to become spoiled and — lazy — and I want to work, Major ——"

For a moment it seemed as if she could not speak.

"And — I think, perhaps some day we could manage — I mean so that I could go to school — to college. I would rather you sent me, even if I have to go economically. I have a nasty pride, I reckon; it's the Ravenel in me, I suspect ——"

Her father was watching her with smiling eyes.

"I don't like to be turned into an — *orphan* — while I have you ——"

They both laughed.

"You remember the time Mrs. Boland gave me one of Sally's outgrown dresses, and I asked you what she took me for — an Orphans' Home or the Salvation Army? Well — I am like that yet, a bit — I ——"

There was a catch in her voice, but she went on:

"I was thinking this morning how long I have been walking with you, Major. Remember how we used to go down the lane after tea in Virginia? That time you were so ill? I always held to your hand — and you told me about the flowers — the rhododendrons on the hills. And I remember how, when you used to clip the roses, I held the basket. I could scarcely wait to get my hand in yours again. It felt so big and comfortable — so secure. I think — if you don't

mind — I'll walk with you a little farther, Major."

She turned and left the room suddenly. She had never before seen tears in his eyes. They frightened her.

She went upstairs and sat down before the desk in the tower room. The windows were open. The air floated in softly, rippling the little curls that strayed about her neck and forehead. The old Peak glittered.

Her glance strayed to the motto above the desk, and to a note beside it.

She smiled as she took it down and blew away the dust, smiled as she read the fading lines:

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